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THE CHILD OF THE PARISH.

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CHILD OF THE PARISH.

A Novel.

BY

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Tr. Mary A. Robinson.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS.

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THE CHOICE SERIES: ISSUED SEMI-MONTHLY. SUBSCRIPTION PRICE, TWELVE DOLLARS PER ANNUM. NO. 81, MARCH 15, 1893. ENTERED AT THE NEW YORK, N. Y., POST OFFICE AS SECOND CLASS MAIL MATTER.

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THE CHILD OF THE PARISH

CHAPTER I.

THE FATHER'S CRIME.

IN October, 1860, in B——, a provincial capital of Moravia, the trial of Martin Holub, brickmaker, and Barbara, his wife, was brought to a close.

Towards the end of June of the same year, these people, with two children, a boy of thirteen and a girl of ten, had come to the village of Kunovic* from their home in Soleschau,† another village at the foot of the Hrad, one of the heights of the Mars-range. On the day of their arrival, the man had entered into a contract with the steward of the manor, had assigned to his wife and son, as well as to several workmen whom he had hired, their respective tasks, and had then repaired to the village-tavern for a drink. This arrangement was kept up during the three months which the family spent in Kunovic. The woman, and Pavel,* the boy, worked; the man was either drunk or on the way to become so. Sometimes he would come staggering to their common dormitory, under the roof of the brick-shed, and the next day the family would appear at the brickyard limping, and black and blue all over. The workmen, who were not willing to submit, as was expected of them, to the family-discipline of the brickmaker, were replaced by others, who also disappeared very shortly.

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* Pronounce Kounovich.

† Pronounce the "au" like "ow" in "how."

At last only the woman and the children were to be met with at the place of work. The former was tall, strongly built, with evident traces of former beauty in her sunburnt face; the boy, clumsy and short-necked, resembled nothing more than an unlicked cub. The girl was called Milada, and was a delicate little creature, with slender limbs, from whose light-blue eyes there flashed more life and intelligence than from the dark ones of Barbara and

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* Pronounce Pahvel.

Pavel together. The little one exercised a sort of control over the other two, and at the same time made herself useful to them by various little acts of help. Without the child, no words would ever have been exchanged at the brickyard. Mother and son worked unceasingly from dawn till dark, gloomy and silent.

This went on for a long time, and, to the indignation of the pious in the village, no rest was taken even on Sundays and holidays. This wrong-doing was reported to the curate, who protested against it, but without result. In consequence, the reverend gentleman, on the afternoon of the festival of the Ascension of the Virgin, repaired to the brickyard in person, and commanded the woman Holub to cease at once the occupation by which she was desecrating the holiday. Unfortunately, however, Martin, who happened to be in the shed sleeping off the effects of his last drunken spell, awoke at the wrong moment, rose, and approached the group. He had no sooner observed that Pavel, with evident approval, was listening to the clerical admonition with open mouth and arms hanging by his side, than he fell upon him from behind. The curate did not delay to hasten to the assistance of the boy, and rescued him, indeed, from his father's blows, but, by so doing, attracted the wrath of the latter towards himself. Before all the witnesses whom Holub's vociferations had drawn to the spot, and who increased in number with every minute, the furious fellow overwhelmed the curate with a torrent of vile abuse, suddenly sprang close up to him, and shook his first in his face. The reverend gentleman did not lose countenance for one moment, but turned away in disgust, and, with a cane in his right hand, which he had raised in self-defense at the drunkard's approach, gave him a slight blow on the head. Martin uttered a howl, threw himself on the ground, writhed like a worm, and roared out that he was killed, that His Reverence had murdered him. At first he was answered by a general laugh of derision, but his cause was too bad a one not to find at least a few defenders. Among the crowd which curiosity had drawn around the man as he lay on the ground, a few voices were raised in his favor, met with contradiction, and retaliated in a manner which soon called forth personal violence. The curate's authority was just sufficient to compel the brawlers to clear the field. They went to the tavern in a body, there to drink the health of His Reverence's victim, and continued to do so until a posse of young peasants tried to put a stop to the disorderly doings of the vagabonds. This resulted in a general fight, such as had not taken place in

Kunovic since the last grand wedding. The local police gave the storm full liberty to spend itself, and, in reward of this shrewdness mingled with caution, had the whole village on their side the next morning. The common opinion was that, in the whole affair, there was but one guilty person—the brickmaker,—and that he should be gotten rid of as soon as possible. The steward of the manor was glad to annul the contract which Martin could not at any rate have fulfilled; for, however diligent his wife and son might be, they could not do more than was possible. Holub was paid off and discharged. Of the money which was due him, over and above the amounts which he had drawn in advance, he was not allowed to keep a kreutzer; the host at the tavern laid claim to it all.

After a vain attempt to recover what he considered his rights, there was nothing left to the fellow but to go his way. The departure of the brickmakers took place. First in line walked the head of the family, in tight duck trousers, fringed out at the bottom, and a torn jacket of blue Canton flannel. His hat, full of holes, was set on one side of his head; his red, drunken face was bloated, and his lips were uttering curses against the priest and his followers, who had deprived him of his honest livelihood.

A few steps behind him came his wife. Her forehead was bandaged, and she seemed hardly able to drag herself along, but still was drawing a small wagon which contained some tools and household utensils, as well as Milada, wrapped in a blanket. Was she sick? Black and blue? It was easy to conjecture the latter, for just before their departure Martin had been in a towering passion with his family. Pavel closed the procession; with both arms pressed against the back of the wagon, he pushed it on vigorously, helping along with his head whenever they encountered people who either sent after the emigrants a look of pity, or gave Holub's wild invectives back in kind.

A few days later, on a stormy, gray September morning, the sexton, as he passed the door of the sacristy on his way to the parsonage, to get the keys, noticed that it stood ajar. Much astonished, and not knowing, at first, what to think of this, he entered the sacristy and saw the presses open, and the vestments lying about the floor and divested of their gold trimmings. He put his hands to his head, went on into the church, and there found the tabernacle broken open, and empty. He was seized with a fit of trembling. "Thieves!" he gasped, "Thieves!" while he felt as if some one had seized him by the nape of the neck, and hardly knew how he got out of the church and to the parsonage.

The curate was not in the habit of locking his door. "Who would want to take anything from me?" he used to say; and thus the sacristan had only to press the latch. He did so. Oh, horror! In the hall, on the floor, lay the curate's old servant, at full length, unconscious, covered with blood. As the cold air from the open door blew upon her, she moved, stared at the sexton, and with a faint, but horribly expressive gesture, pointed to her master's room.

The sacristan, almost insane with terror, took a few steps, looked, uttered a groan, and fell on his knees for horror at the sight which met his eyes.

Fifteen minutes later the whole village knew that His Reverence had been attacked during the night and murdered, evidently in a struggle for the keys of the church; a violent struggle, as everything indicated.

There could be no doubt with regard to the perpetrator of the horrible deed. Even if the old servant had not testified to that effect, every one would have known that it was Martin Holub. He was first sought for in Soleschau. He had been there a short time before, had put his children to board with the parish-herdsman, and had gone away again with his wife.

Hardly a week had passed before the couple were discovered in a thieves' den on the frontier, just as Holub was in the act of bargaining with a pedlar about a fragment of the pyx from the church of Kunovic, which he had broken in pieces. The tramp was arrested only after violent resistance; his wife submitted to her fate with stolid indifference. Ere long, the two were arraigned before the court in B——.

The trial, which met with no interruption, progressed rapidly. From the beginning, Holub declared that it was not he, but his wife, who had devised and executed the crime, and often as the improbability of this declaration was demonstrated to him, he still came back to it again and again. At the same time he entangled himself more and more in his own coarsely-spun net of lies, and afforded the repulsive spectacle, witnessed very frequently, of a hardened reprobate who becomes his own accuser by trying to defend himself.

The demeanor of the woman, on the other hand, was very singular.

The uniformity of her answers reminded one of the celebrated: *Non mi ricordo,** they were invariably " Just as my man says. Just what my man says."

In his presence she stood motionless, hardly breathing, cold perspiration on her forehead. her eyes fixed on him with a questioning expression of mortal terror. If he was not in the hall, and thus out of her sight, she still seemed to think that he was near; her cowed look would wander searchingly about, and suddenly fix itself, with a horrible stare, on vacancy. The opening of a door, the slightest noise, would cause her to tremble and quake, and with a shudder, she would repeat her words: "Just as my man says. Just what my man says." It was in vain that she was told: "You are signing your death-warrant;" it made no impression upon her, did not appall her. She feared neither the judges nor death, she feared only "her man."

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* " I do not remember."

And it was on the strength of this fear, bordering on insanity, of her lord and tormentor, that her counsel, in a brilliant speech, demanded, in view of his client's evident irresponsibility, that she be acquitted. An acquittal, however, was impossible, but the penalty inflicted upon her as the accessory to a heavy crime, was comparatively light. The sentence was: "Death by hanging for the man, ten years in the penitentiary for the woman."

Barbara entered upon her punishment at once. Martin Holub's sentence was executed after an interval of time determined by the court.

CHAPTER II.

THE CHILDREN'S FRIENDS.

For the authorities of the parish of Soleschau the question now arose: What was to be done with the children of the criminals? They had no relations, who would have been in duty bound to take care of them, and no one was likely to volunteer to do so.

In his perplexity, the burgomaster, with Pavel and Milada, repaired to the castle, and requested an audience of the lady of the manor.

As soon as the old lady was informed of the object of his visit, she came hurrying into the court as fast as her legs, one of which was perceptibly shorter than the other, would admit of. With her sharply-cut face stretched forward, spectacles on her aquiline nose, and her elbows, pushed far back, she limped towards the group which awaited her at the gate. The burgomaster, a fine-looking man in the prime of life, took off his hat and made a low bow.

MILADA.

"What do you want?" said the old lady, screwing up her dim eyes at him. "I know what you want; but that's out of the question! I can't have anything to do with the children of those vagabonds that murdered our good curate. Why, there's the boy. How he looks! I know him, he stole some of my cherries. Didn't you?" she added, addressing Pavel, who turned mahogany-color, and began to squint from embarrassment.

"Why don't you answer? Why don't you take off your cap?"

"Because he hasn't got any," said the burgomaster in excuse.

"Indeed! What is that on his head, then?"

"Tangled hair, your Grace."

A merry laugh was heard, but ceased at once, as the old lady raised her thin forefinger threateningly at her who had uttered it.

"And that's the girl? Come here."

Milada approached her confidingly, and the look with which the lady of the manor examined the child's smiling face, lost more and more of its severity. Her eye glanced over the little form and over the rags which barely covered it, and fixed itself upon the slender little feet, which were gray with dust.

One of the sudden changes of mood to which the old lady was subject, now took place.

"The girl, perhaps—" she began again, "I might relieve the parish of the girl. Although I really don't know why I should do anything for the parish. I *do* know, however, that the child would be ruined in your hands; and what is the reason that the child would be ruined in your hands?"

The burgomaster was about to venture a modest reply.

"You had better not say anything," the lady interrupted him. "I know all about it. The children whose schooling is supposed to be paid by the parish, can't tell A from Z when they are twelve years old."

She shook her head in displeasure, again looked down at Milada's feet, and added: "and the children whom the parish ought to supply with shoes, all run around barefoot. I know you all," she continued, as the burgomaster once more tried to protest against her reproaches. "I have long since given up all attempts at making any change in your mode of administration. Take the boy along with you, and have him cared for in your own way; he deserves no better, I dare say, than to be a child of the parish. The girl can stay here."

The burgomaster obeyed her gesture of dismissal, delighted to have gotten rid of at least half of the new burden which had fallen upon his village. Pavel followed him to the end of the court. There he stopped and looked round after his sister. A maid had already appeared, to whom the old lady was giving directions with regard to Milada.

"Give her a bath," she said, "burn her rags, pick out some clothes from the Christmas supply."

"Will she get anything to eat?" was the question that flashed through Pavel's mind. He was sure she was hungry. Since he could think, it had been his most important duty to protect the child from hunger. It was well to have clothes; bathing was not bad, either, particularly in numerous company, in the horsepond. How often had Pavel carried the little one to the water, and let her paddle in it with her hands and feet! But the main thing, after all, was not to be hungry.

"Tell them you're hungry!" the boy called out to his sister in admonition.

"Why, there's that boy still!" replied the echo which his words awakened, from the castle.

The burgomaster, who was about to turn the corner of the garden-fence, took Pavel by the collar, and drew him away with him.

The consultations of the parish authorities on Pavel's fate lasted three days. At last they conceived a good idea, and hastened to carry it out. A deputation repaired to the castle, and submitted to her Grace, the Baroness, the most respectful request, that, as she had already been so *dobrotiva* (extraordinarily kind) as to take charge of the daughter of the unhappy Holub, she would also interest herself in his son.

The answer which the fathers of the village received was a hopelessly negative one, and the consultations recommenced.

What was to be done?

"What is generally done in such cases," was the burgomaster's opinion; "the boy must go from house to house, and find board and lodging at a different house each day."

But all the peasants refused. Not one of them was willing to have the son of a murderer in the company of his own children, even for one day in every five or six weeks.

At last it was decided that the boy should remain where he was, where his own parents had placed him: in the care of that rascal, the parish-herdsmen.

To be sure, if the parish had been able to afford the luxury of a conscience, the latter would have protested against this expedient. The herdsman (he bore the classic name of Virgil) and his wife, together with the cottagers with whom they lodged, were among the most disreputable of the inhabitants of the village. He was a confirmed drunkard ; she, treacherous and malicious, had repeatedly been before the courts for secret quackery, without allowing herself to be deterred thereby from continuing to practice her obscure profession.

No one would have thought of giving any other child in charge of these people ; but there was no reason to fear that Pavel would see anything bad while with them that he had not seen a hundred times at home.

So the parish swallowed the bitter pill, and allowed four pecks of grain per annum for Pavel's support. The herdsman was given the right to make use of him in driving the cattle to pasture and watching them, and promised to see that he went to church on Sundays, and to school as often as possible in winter.

Virgil, with his family, occupied a small room in the last hovel but one of the village. It was six feet square, and had one window with four panes, each as large as half a brick, which was never opened, because the rotten frame would have fallen to pieces during the process.

Under the window stood a bench, on which the herdsman slept at night. Opposite the bench there was a bedstead filled with straw, which was occupied by the wife and daughter. The entrance to the room was through a narrow hallway, at the end of which the hearth was located. The latter was intended to serve for a stove as well, but was rarely used for either purpose, because occasions for stealing wood became less and less frequent. So that corner was made a storeroom for the scant supplies of grain and bread, for Virgil's boots, which were never cleaned, his whip, his knotty stick, for a dirt-colored confusion of old bottles, baskets minus handles, pots, and broken pottery, worthy of the brush of a realistic painter.

Among all this rubbish Pavel had arranged a lair for Milada, where she slept, rolled up like a kitten. He would stretch himself upon the floor, close by the hearth, and when the little one awoke during the night, she would put out her hands to feel for him, pull his hair, and asked: "Are you there, Pavlicek."*

He would growl: "I'm here, go to sleep," and, perhaps, would bite her finger in fun, and she would give a little scream in fun, and Virgil would curse and swear at them from the room: "Be quiet, you robber-brats, you gallows-birds!"

Milada would tremble and be silent, and Pavel would rise to his knees inaudibly, and whisper to her softly and stroke her until she went to sleep again.

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* Pronounce Pavlicheck.

The first time that he went to rest without his sister, he thought: "To-night I'll sleep finely, that brat won't be there to wake me up." But at daybreak he was already in the village street, and took the direct way to the castle. The latter stood in the midst of a garden, which was surrounded by a wire fence; a thick border of evergreens around the entire inclosure shut off any view of the sanctuary from the outside. Pavel stationed himself by the gate, which was directly opposite the house, pressed his face against the iron bars, and waited. For a long time all remained quiet; suddenly, however, Pavel thought he heard the opening and closing of windows and doors, and confused loud talking; it even seemed to him as if he recognized Milada's voice. At the same time a violent gust of wind arose, shook the dead branches from the trees, and chased the dead leaves through the air in a rustling dance. Two maids came running from the servants' quarters towards the house; one of them nearly stumbled over the old peacock, who was strutting to and fro in the court. He gave so comical a jump to one side, that Pavel had to laugh aloud. There was now more life in the castle and its surroundings; people even came to the garden-gate; but those who came in by it or went out of it, locked it carefully behind them. This was an arrangement the novelty of which struck many a passer-by. Fastening the garden-gate in broad daylight! What did that mean? Such an inconvenient arrangement was not likely to be kept up long.

But it was kept up, to the general astonishment of the villagers, who disapproved of it decidedly, and, after a while, the reason for it was made known to them.

Pavel was told of it by Vinska, the ugly shepherd's handsome daughter, as follows:

"Here, you scamp, your sister's just as bad as you are. Petruschka, the kitchen-maid from the castle, says her Grace treats your sister like her own child, and Milada is always trying to run away. That's the reason they lock up the castle now like a money-box. If I were the Baroness, I wouldn't do that, but I know what I would do—they hung your father up by the neck, and I should tie your sister's hands and feet together and hang her up against the wall."

This picture remained before Pavel's eyes all day long, and during the night it blended with another one, which he remembered from his childhood.

At that time he had, on one occasion, seen the game-keeper carrying home a very young fawn, which he had caught in the forest. Its legs were tied together with a rope, and the keeper carried it by a stick which was passed between them. Pavel remembered how it had bent its slender neck, pricked up its ears, and tried to raise its head; he remembered the despair which had looked out of the delicate little creature's eyes.

In his dream he saw those eyes again, but they looked like Milada's.

Once he cried aloud: "Are you there?" raised himself while half-asleep, again cried: "Are you there?" felt about with his hands, and in so doing, awoke fully. With the rapidity of lightning, with the force of the tempest, the desolate feeling of separation came over him, and prostrated him. The rough boy burst into tears, into passionate sobs, waked the herdsman's family, waked the cottagers who slept on the other side of the hall, with his loud weeping. The whole company assembled, threatened him, and as he remained deaf to all admonitions, however emphatic they might be, united their forces to throw him out of the house.

That was a thorough cooling-off, even for the most burning sorrow! For a while Pavel remained lying perfectly quiet and motionless upon the firmly frozen ground. The sensation, so entirely new and so horrible to him, of boundless longing, diminished by degrees, and another, which he well knew of old, took its place: defiance, cold, bitter hatred.

"Wait," he said, "just wait; I'll show you!"

The resolve to bring matters to an end was formed at once, the plan for its execution ripened but slowly in Pavel's dull head. But after he had once overcome the great exertion of devising it, everything else seemed to the boy nothing but child's play. He would penetrate into the castle, carry off his sister, go with her over the mountains into foreign countries, hire himself out as a laborer, and never again hear the reproach that he was the son of his parents.

With the consciousness of a victor, Pavel arose from the ground, and making a large circuit, went around the village towards the castle. The watchman's whistle warned him amicably against the paths which he ought to avoid. The fields were covered with hard, deep snow, the earth was lighter than the sky, in which the pale crescent of the moon disappeared again and again behind drifting clouds. Pavel reached the garden-fence, climbed over it, and let himself down on the other side by the branches of the pines. There he was in the garden, and knew very well in which part of it; that which was farthest removed from the village, the best which he could have chosen for his present purpose, as well as for his projected flight. Full of increasing confidence, he went on, straight forward all the time, and he would reach the castle. What was to be done then Pavel had not pictured to himself distinctly; he was going to deliver Milada, that was clear as day to him, and though all else might be doubt and perplexity, that idea illumined his soul, that thought he clung to. It did not trouble him that he began to feel wretchedly cold in his miserable rags, that his limbs grew numb and stiff; but it was bad that the darkness grew thicker and thicker, and every few minutes Pavel ran against a tree and fell down. Even though, the first time, he jumped up again immediately, the second brought the temptation: "I'll lie still a minute, and rest, and sleep." But in spite of this he arose with strong will-power, groped his way onward, and finally reached the goal at which he had aimed—the castle. His heart beat high as he touched the old weather-beaten wall. Who knows how near he may be to his sister; who knows whether she is not asleep in the room under the window of which he is standing, that window which he can reach with his hands—it *might* just as well be, why shouldn't it? and gently, gently, he begins to knock. At that moment he hears a growl close to the ground, something comes creeping up on short legs, and before he can think, it has jumped upon him and is trying to seize him by the throat. Pavel suppresses a cry ; he chokes the cur with all his might. But the dog is stronger than he, and well versed in the art of dealing with an enemy. The howl which he uttered in so doing had the desired effect, it brought people to the spot. They arrived half asleep, and wholly frightened, but when they saw that they had only a boy to deal with, their courage rose. Pavel was surrounded and overpowered, although he raged and defended himself like a wild beast.

CHAPTER III.

A PAIR OF BOOTS.

No one learned what Pavel had wanted in the castle, but the obstinacy with which he refused to give any information on the subject, proved plainly enough that he must have had the worst intentions. Probably burglary or incendiarism ; the fellow was capable of anything. Thus spake public opinion, and the parish having been invested with paternal rights towards the boy, decided that Pavel should meet with an exemplary flogging from the hands of schoolmaster Habrecht, in the presence of the whole school.

The schoolmaster, a sickly, nervous man, was very loth to execute the judgment assigned to him. It was his opinion that a punishment thus dealt out before a youthful public, rarely benefits the one to whom it is applied, and always harms those who witness it. "Those beasts, by such a sight, become only worse beasts," he remarked, far too coarsely for a pedagogue. Although not fully convinced, the parish-fathers had repeatedly deferred to his objection, but this time it was of no avail.

On the day appointed for the chastisement of the nocturnal intruder, the master received him from the hands of the beadles with a sigh, and taking him by the collar, led him to the door of the schoolroom. Here he stopped, raised the bowed head of the boy, and said :

" Look at me ; why do you always look on the floor, you bad boy ?"

These words were not kind, and yet, why was it that they really did Pavel's heart good, and that even the way in which the master pulled his hair had something in it which inspired confidence, and acted like a cordial ?

"You'd better be afraid, you scamp, you reprobate ! you'd better be afraid !" Habrecht continued, rolling his eyes and waving his thin arm with a most significant gesture. And Pavel, out of whom, for the past three days, no one had been able to get a word, who during that time had looked nobody in the face, suddenly raised his eyes shyly to the master, and blinking, with a half smile, said :

" But I'm *not* afraid."

From the schoolroom there had at first come a humming, as from a beehive, then the humming changed to a confused din, and now there was a fight going on for the best places for the expected exhibition. The master angrily muttered something to himself, and shaking Pavel once more, said :

" If you are not afraid, then, you had better scream, scream as loud as you can !" and with this he opened the door and entered the schoolroom. The tumult suddenly ceased, only a few involuntary exclamations of satisfied expectation were heard ; in the friendliest manner room was made on the benches for all ; the most touching harmony prevailed. The master placed Pavel beside his desk, and looked around for the rod. As for a while he either did not or did not appear to see it, a voice called out : " It's there by the window, in the corner !" The voice came from one of the last rows, and belonged to Arnost, the son of the cottager of whom Virgil hired his lodging. Pavel clenched his fist at him, which gave rise to a murmur of indignation. More than a hundred eyes were turned with an expression of malice and hatred upon the brown, ragged boy. He was boiling inwardly, and as clearly as it was possible for him to think, so clearly he thought : " What have I done to you ? Why are you my enemies ?"

Habrecht commanded the children to be silent, and made a speech, in which he prepared them for a remarkable disappointment. "You are all full of pleasant anticipation. Why? What about? Will the flogging that is given to another do you any good? Mark my words. It will *hurt* you! Each one of you—" his voice fell to a mysterious whisper, and he slowly stretched out his forefinger towards his audience: "Each one of you, who sits there, ready to jump out of his skin with malicious pleasure, will soon want to jump out of it with pain. Each one who stares over here and looks on while I deal out my blows, will feel them too—*feel* them!" he repeated his gruesome prediction, which seemed to frighten even him. "And now you will see what your master can do!"

All the children shuddered at the thought of the miracle that was to be wrought on them, their timid eyes glanced only askance at the dreaded master, whose exterior, in its height and leanness, had something ghost-like about it. The boys stared at the floor, the girls covered their eyes with their aprons.

The master, however, went to work quickly. With fabulous rapidity the rod was whirled around the head of the delinquent, and then dealt a number of blows which Pavel took for the introduction to the actual punishment. But instead of following up the latter, the master suddenly said: "Dear me, my spectacles have fallen on the floor. Pick them up. You may thank me for your flogging after school."

Pavel stared at him in stupid astonishment, he was still waiting for the real thrashing,—and now he heard that he had received it, and was ordered to sit down—in the last seat of the last bench.

The Master pulled out his handkerchief, wiped the perspiration from his forehead, slowly took a pinch of snuff, and opened school.

Arnost, who was as red as a boiled lobster, whispered to his neighbor: "Did you look?" "Just a little," was the answer. "Do you feel anything?" "I feel it in my back." "My ear burns." An inquisitive little girl, whose eye had accidentally encountered a hole in her apron, which she made use of for peeping, confessed to some of her schoolmates that she felt as if she were sitting on nothing but peas.

After school, Pavel was going away with the rest, but the master called him back, looked at him awhile keenly, and finally asked him if he were not ashamed.

Pavel in a low tone answered: "No."

"No? Why no? Have you bidden good-bye to shame?"

Pavel maintained the obstinate silence to which the master was accustomed in the most wretched and most irregular of his pupils. Until now he had taken no notice of him, but to-day, when he had received orders to punish him for an unknown offence, he had felt pity for him. He regretted this now, and went on, severely :

"Grown up in shame—yes, grown up, nearly fourteen—used to shame all your life, and you don't even know how it feels!"

Then Pavel said : "I know," and the boy's mouth was distorted by a mature expression of suppressed bitterness. He had not understood what the master had meant by the blows which had hardly hurt him ; but now that he reproached him with the wretchedness of his life, he understood him very well.

"I know," he repeated, in a tone with the forced boldness of which there mingled, unconsciously, the pain of a deep disappointment.

The master examined him attentively—the boy was the embodiment of misery! Not through the fault of Nature. She had favored him, and made him healthy, vigorous and strong ; that was shown by his broad chest, his red lips, his strong, yellowish teeth. But the friendly intentions of Nature had been frustrated by hard work, bad nourishment, neglect of every kind. As he stood there, with his tangled, bushy brown hair, which made his bent head seem disproportionately large ; with his sunken cheeks, and high cheek-bones; his lean, sturdy figure clad in a coat, full of holes, of some thin summer stuff; his feet wound round with rags, he offered a sight which was repugnant and at the same time inexpressibly sad, because he had evidently not entirely lost the consciousness of his wretched state. For a long time the master did not speak, and Pavel, too, was silent, but he dropped his lower lip more and more sullenly and began to look surreptitiously towards the door, as one who was trying to snatch an opportunity to run away.

At last the master said, "Don't be so stupid. When you're out of school, you ought to think, 'How can I get in?' and not, when you're in it, 'How can I get out?'"

Pavel was startled; this was again quite incomprehensible to him, and agreed with the opinion entertained far and wide, that the schoolmaster was able to read the thoughts of men.

"Go now," said the other, "and come back again to-morrow, and the day after, too; and if you come steadily for a whole week, I will give you a pair of decent boots."

"Boots? such as the peasant children wear? real boots with high tops?" Incessantly, on his homeward way, Pavel repeated to himself the words "real boots." They sounded to him like a fairy tale; they made him forget that he had intended to give Arnost a thrashing. He was at the school the next morning before the door was opened, and during school-hours he exerted himself with burning zeal, and scorned the trouble which studying gave him. He also scorned the drastic admonitions of Virgil and his wife, who tried to force him to go to the factory to work, instead of going to school for pleasure. To be sure, this had to be done in secrecy; they did not dare to use open forcible measures to detain the boy from school; that would have been too conspicuously at variance with the agreement entered upon with the parish concerning him.

The week passed, and on the afternoon of the last day Pavel came running home with a new boot in each hand.

Vinska was at home alone when he arrived; she observed him closely as he placed the shining pair in the corner by the hearth, and stationed himself at some distance from it, lost in silent admiration. His features, on which misery had set its stamp, where incapable of expressing joy, but they appeared more animated than usual, and a clumsy satisfaction was depicted upon them.

Once he drew nearer, lifted up one of the boots, rubbed it with his sleeve, kissed it, and put it back in its place.

A loud laugh was heard; Vinska came to the threshold of the room, learned her shoulder against the door-post (there was no door between the room and the hall), and asked:

"Where did you steal those boots, you rascal?"

He did not even look round at her, much less give her an answer. But Vinska repeated her question so often, that he at last snarled:

"Stolen! exactly, stolen!"

"You donkey," she muttered, "you see, you say so yourself, now."

Her covetous gray eyes glanced alternately at the boots and at her own prettily-formed bare feet. Pavel had crouched down on the floor beside his precious new property; it seemed to him as if he must defend it against an approaching danger, and he prepared himself to meet the latter. Vinska bent her head to one side, suddenly smiled at the boy, who looked up at her menacingly, and said in an insinuting voice:

"Come, tell me where you got them."

He did not know what was happening to him. That was the tone in which only a short time ago he had heard Vinska speak to Peter, who was her lover. Burning waves surged in his bosom; he devoured his charming tormenter with his eyes, and thought that the feeling which had seized him with such tremendous force, was the desire to fall upon her and give her a good thrashing.

But at the same time he did not move, but merely opened his lips involuntarily, and said :

"The schoolmaster gave them to me."

Vinska began to giggle. "Oh, Lord, he! If you got them from him, you've got nothing at all."

"What—nothing?"

"No, nothing! When you wake up to-morrow morning the boots will be gone."

"Gone? Nonsense!"

"Yes, indeed, anything that the schoolmaster gives, won't keep even over night. You know he is a wizard."

Pavel grew angry. "I know he is *not* a wizard."

The girl turned up her lip. "Blockhead! He was dead in his coffin for three days. Wasn't he? And doesn't every child know that any one that's been dead three days, has had a glimpse of hell, and learned some of the devil's tricks from him?"

Pavel stared at her speechlessly; a cold shudder ran down his back. Vinska yawned, pressed her cheek to the shoulder drawn up against the door-post, and after a while said carelessly, as if she were repeating a story which she had told a hundred times, and grown tired of :

"He gave a pair of shoes to old blind Marska, too, who died in our house last year. She set them in front of her bed at night, and when she went to put her feet into then in the morning, she stepped, instead of into her new shoes, on a huge toad, as big as a plate."

Pavel cried out vehemently: "That's a lie!" He turned alternately hot and cold with anger and fear, and suddenly the tears gushed from his eyes.

Vinska gave him a look full of disdain, and went back into the room.

At night, Pavel tried his best to keep awake; he wanted to guard his treasure; he also repeated one paternoster after another, so as to drive away all evil spirits. Nevertheless, he fell asleep at last, and when he awoke the next morning, Vinska's prophecy had been fulfilled—the boots had disappeared.

CHAPTER IV.

A GLIMPSE OF MILADA.

Pavel said not a word about his misfortune. When Vinska asked him, with a roguish laugh, where his boots were, he dealt her so hard a blow that she ran away screaming. The questions of his schoolmates, too, he answered with cuffs, the heaviest of which fell to the share of Arnost, who complained about them to the master. But this had no result, for it was one of the peculiarities of the latter that he suddenly became deaf as a post whenever one of his pupils informed against another. A week passed. Pavel did not make his appearance at school again; he went to the factory of his own accord and worked there from morning till night. Several times the master sent for him, and as this was of no avail, he at last went himself to Virgil's house to get the boy. The herdsman's wife received him, and confused him utterly before he could even open his mouth, by her loud lamentations. After five minutes, the poor man felt as if he was standing under a spout from which shot instead of water was raining down upon him. His tired and aching head was all in a whirl.

The woman called upon God and all the saints to witness her tribulations. No, she had no idea what she was taking upon herself, when she agreed to take charge of the child of a father who had been hanged and a mother who was in jail. She had seen many things in her life, but never anything quite so bad as that boy. Every word spoken by him was falsehood and calumny. Had n't he told people that his forster-parents kept him from going to school, and that they pocketed the weekly wages that he earned at the factory?

Carried away by indignation, she added, opening her wicked eyes wide, and fixing them significantly upon the old man:

" And does n't he, saving your presence, accuse other people, that are of far more consequence than we poor folks, of horrible things?"

The master had pulled out his handkerchief, and was mopping his bald head with it. He knew the reports which were in circulation with regard to him, and while at times they annoyed him exceedingly, yet, on the other hand, he would often find amusement in fostering them. To-day, however, the former was the case; he raised his hand, as if in defense, and said:

"Hush, hush! Hold your tongue!"

"O Holy Virgin, I?" cried the women. "I'm not saying anything! I'd sooner tear my tongue out. I only mean that your honor ought n't to take the least notice of that bad boy any more. Those beautiful boots! he did n't keep them two days."

"Indeed! Where are they?"

Virgilova (as she was called in the village) launched forth into a new torrent of speech: If his honor wanted to know what had become of those boots, he had better ask the Jew to whom the boy had sold them. It was more than likely, however, she went on, her voice growing more and more shrill, that the Jew would pretend not to know anything about the matter; and Habrecht, wholly stunned, held his hands over his ears and commenced a retreat. After a few steps, however, he stopped, turned, and told the women not to fail to send Pavel to school the next morning. She promised to deliver the message, and did so by telling Pavel in the evening that the master had been there and had left word that he never wished to see his face again.

The admonition was superfluous; even without it, Pavel would have kept as far away from the master as possible. But on the other hand, he was constantly at Vinska's heels, and obeyed her like an ill-natured dog, who, dissatisfied with his master, is always ready for rebellion, and yet submits again and again. Whatever she wished, was done; he went on her errands, he stole wood from the forest for her, as well as eggs from the barns of the peasants; he fell more and more under subjection to her.

Nevertheless, whatever he did, wherever he went, there was *one* thing which he never forgot, one roundabout way which was never too far for him; day after day he went to the gate of the castle garden, and looked into the court, and stared at the windows of the house. At first, with a yearning hope in his heart; later, when the latter had gradually become extinct, from mere habit.

One fine afternoon in May, when he reached his post of observation, he was highly surprised to find the gate open. Under the portal of the castle stood the Baroness' equipage, a close carriage, drawn by two fat grays, with a trunk strapped on behind. The servants crowded around it, bowing and courtesying, the door was closed noisily, the lackey climbed to his seat beside the coachman, the heavy body swayed on its spiral springs, and the vehicle began to move. At a short trot the horses made circuit of the court, turned slowly around the post of the gate, and followed the road. Pavel had cast a glance into the interior of the carriage, and had started back as if dazzled. He pressed his face to the post; he closed his eyes, and still saw—saw plainly and clearly with his eyes closed what he had just seen with them while open—that the Baroness was not alone in her splendid carriage; beside her sat a little lady, in fine clothes and with a pretty hat on her head, who had well-known features, the features of Milada, but such round and rosy cheeks as his sister had never had in her life.

Suddenly the boy straightened himself, and ran after the carriage as if mad. The latter had made another turn, and was slowly descending the castle hill, held back by an old-fashioned brake. Pavel crossed a field, reached the road again ahead of the carriage, and waited for it by the roadside with a beating heart. It came along creaking and rattling, and the boy stretched himself, looked, and again saw the lovely apparition of a while ago. And now he, too, had been seen, a cry of joy reached his ear. Milada's voice called: "Pavel, Pavel!" The little girl threw herself against the window with such vehemence that the pane was broken to pieces. The carriage stopped suddenly, and the footman was about to jump from the box. But the Baroness cried, hastily, "Stay where you are, Coachman, drive on, drive that boy away!" The whip snapped around Pavel's head, and from the carriage there came a loud wail of sorrow. Mingled with it, serious, loving remonstrances were heard. Pavel saw that the old lady had folded the little girl in her arms, and was letting her weep on her bosom. This weeping cut Pavel to the heart; this weeping he must put a stop to.

So he gave a loud, joyous shout, which the happiest of youngsters could not have excelled, and, keeping at a safe distance from the coachman's whip, began, clumsily as a bear, to turn wheels and somersets in rapid succession. Whenever his breath threatened to fail him he would stop, look over at the little girl with a nod and a smile, and make signs and grimaces, until she finally broke out into a merry laugh. Ah, how his heart jumped for joy when he once more heard her sweet laughter.

The distance between him and the carriage increased more and more. Pavel no longer ran and leaped, he merely walked, and when he had reached the foot of the long hill, the horses were just climbing its steep summit. Wearily and panting he ascended it, and when he reached the top he broke down, his pulses throbbing and a reddish glare before his burning eyes.

At his feet was spread the sunlit plain; on its horizon lay the city; some of its houses shone in snowy whiteness; the gilded points of the church-spires glittered like stars against the blue sky. In the direction of the city the high-road wound through green meadows, and on that road a black point was gliding along; this point Pavel followed with his eyes as ardently as if the salvation of his soul depended upon his not losing sight of it. When at last the shadows of the fields absorbed the tiny point, and did not let it re-appear, Pavel stretched himself at full length upon the ground, and remained lying there motionless as a corpse. His sister had become a lady, and had gone away to the town. If he went to the garden-gate now, he might as well pass by; the joy of watching for the little one was over. Bitterness and desolation filled the boy's soul as he thought of the loss of his only happiness. He would fain have wept, but he could not; he would also have been glad to die, right here on the spot. He had often heard his existence execrated by his father as well as by strangers, and never without a feeling of deep indignation; now he himself longed for death, and when one has once got as far as that, he thought, the end can't be very far off. And are we not free to hasten it? There are different ways of doing so. We can hold our breath, for instance, that is not hard; all that is needed is to do it long enough. Pavel makes the attempt with desperate resolution, and as, in so doing, he digs his head into the ground, something moves in his neighborhood, and he hears a faint sound like fluttering of little wings. He looks.

A few steps from him a partridge is sitting on her nest, with her eyes fixed in unutterable terror upon an enemy who is creeping stealthily towards her through the young grain, inaudibly, threateningly, gray—it is a cat. Pavel sees her standing quite near the nest; she licks her lipless mouth, arches her back, and prepares to spring upon her prey. One stroke of the wings and the bird would be out of danger, but it does not stir. Pavel, in his anxiety for the little creature, had forgotten all his ideas of suicide. "Why don't you fly, you stupid thing?" he thought. But instead of escaping, the partridge crouched farther down, sought to cover its nest still more closely, and followed with its little dark eyes every movement of its assailant. Pavel had taken up a clod, jumped up suddenly, and threw it at the cat's head with so much force that she turned upon her own axis, and blinded and sneezing, ran away.

Pavel looked after her; he felt both sad and happy. He had experienced a great sorrow, and had done a good deed. Immediately after he had felt wretched, desolate, and ready to die, there dawned within him something like the consciousness of a power—another higher one than that which his strong arms and his gloomy defiance had often lent him. What power was it? Indistinctly this question arose from the obscure world of his ideas, and he fell into a laborious, yet sweet train of thought which was entirely novel to him.

A loud call: "Pavel, Pavel, come here, Pavel!" awakened him.

In the road stood the schoolmaster, whom one of his accustomed afternoon walks had brought to the spot and who had been observing the boy for some time. He carried a knotty stick in his hand, and quickly hid it behind his back as Pavel approached him.

"You rascal, what are you about?" he asked. "I do believe you are robbing partridges' nests?"

Pavel remained silent, as was his wont when wrongly accused, and the master went on threateningly:

"Don't provoke me, answer me! Take care!" And when the boy persisted in his silence, the master suddenly raised his stick, and aimed a blow at Pavel, which the latter did not evade and which he bore without flinching.

The master's heart was at once stirred with pity and regret.

"Pavel," he said, gently and sadly, "for God's sake, I hear nothing but evil of you—you are in a very bad way; what is going to become of you?"

This appeal did not touch the boy, on the contrary, a strong dose of contempt mingled with his hatred of the old wizard who had deceived him.

"What is going to become of you?" repeated the master.

Pavel stretched himself, placed his hands on his hips, and said:

"A thief."

CHAPTER V.

THE COQUETTE.

The Baroness returned to the castle that same evening, but alone. Her excursions to town were repeated every week during the whole summer, and it was soon known in the village that she went to visit the convent of the pious sisters, whose superior was her intimate friend, and to whom she had confided little Milada for her education. The convent-school had the highest reputation, and when Pavel heard that his sister had been placed there, a feeling of happiness, pride, and gratitude to the Baroness filled his heart.

He even resisted for a time Vinska's invitations and his own desire to undertake raids into the baronial forest. But only for a time. Since the old forester had been pensioned and his son had taken his place, trespassing in the forest had been strictly forbidden. The new law had roused much indignation, and offered great temptations for disregarding it.

A band was formed of boys and girls, all of them children of cottagers, whose leadership Pavel assumed as a natural right. They went to the forest in small groups, merry, bold and wary. They knew the hiding-places and secret paths better than the game-keepers, and experienced a delightful sense of trepidation in going to meet their adventures, which could only end in two ways. They would either reach home in safety, the stolen wood upon their backs, with the prospect of praise and a warm supper, or they would be caught, and receive one whipping on the spot, for stealing, and another at home, for allowing themselves to be captured. The latter fate, indeed, rarely befell any one but Pavel, whose duty it was to cover the retreat, and who was always left in the lurch, because he was sure not to tell tales. For Pavel betrayed no one, and even if he had done so, no one would have believed so bad a boy.

His reputation grew worse from day to day. If any damage was met with in the forest, it was his doing. If a trap was discovered, it was he who had set it; if chickens, potatoes, pears were missing, he had stolen them. If any one accosted and threatened him, he would silently stare in his face. The old people did not even scold him any more; they said he was capable of throwing stones at them from an ambush. In course of time he was made to appear so black, that the Virgil family fairly shone in innocence contrasted to him.

The idea that Pavel must have had a hundred hands and the strength of a giant, to actually execute all the misdeeds which were attributed to him, never entered the heads of his fellow-citizens; but he himself awoke to it slowly, and he was filled with contempt for the stupidity which could believe the most preposterous things of him, if they were only bad. He took pleasure in availing himself of every opportunity to irritate anew the fools who bore him such ill-will, and as others revel in the consciousness of the appreciation which they receive, so he reveled in the consciousness of the enmity which he inspired. Whatever he could do to nourish the latter, he did, and ignored sincerity even towards the priest in the confessional.

Time went on, the summer was nearly over; the first of September, the day of the great church festival, had come. Only the year before, Pavel had pushed through the crowd, barefooted and in rags, and had knelt with the other children of the village, during High Mass, close by the steps of the altar. To-day he did not enter the church; he remained outside, like the beggars and vagabonds, to whom, by his outward equipment, he seemed to belong. His green coat, formerly of decent length, now reached hardly below his waist, and presented, with all its seams burst out, a sample-card of Virgilova's discarded dresses in the shape of large and small patches. His coarse shirt left his breast bare; his linen trousers, shrunken and gray with age, were pulled up high above his knees, as if their wearer were about to wade through the brook.

Pavel stood leaning with his back against the fence of the parsonage-garden, his arms folded above his head, watching, with indifference, the procession of church-goers. The young men and the girls approached in groups; the latter entered the church at once, the former stopped at the fair booths which lined the street, and examining their contents, awaited the ringing of the last bell. One of their number, a puny youth, with an ugly, flat-featured face, made himself conspicuous by his arrogant, conceited manner. He was dressed, partially in city-fashion, in clothes of expensive material; on his black jacket so much stuff had been wasted from sheer affluence that it bulged out in front like a barrel, and rose to a proud hump behind. The other youths showed him a certain deference, which, in spite of a slight admixture of mockery, betrayed the wish to be on good terms with him. And this was but natural! For he was Peter, the only son of the burgomaster, the heir to the largest, most thriving farm in the whole place.

The first stroke of the bell resounded ; the throng of church-goers had disappeared; only a few, who were belated, were hastening along the village-street. Last of all, quite alone, came Vinska, at once attracting the attention of the small court which surrounded Peter.

"Thunder!" a voice was heard to say ; "there's Vinska! how handsome she looks to-day! How becoming that head-kerchief is to her! Faith, I believe it's a silk one! and she's got six skirts on. And what a modest face she puts on! A nice saint she is, to be sure!"

Each one had a malicious word for her, or a complimentary one, which was far more humiliating than the former. Peter alone said nothing, but attentively watched the flight of a bird which had been sitting on the fence near by, and had risen into the air when Vinska approached. The girl soon disappeared in the crowd around the entrance of the church. The young men followed her, and Pavel heard one of them say to another :

"I should like to know how that old bandy-legged vagabond, Virgil, ever came to have such a pretty daughter!"

The other made a grimace: "And I should like to know," he replied, "where the vagabond's pretty daughter got her fine clothes!"

Pavel had not noticed that Vinska wore fine clothes, nor had he seen anything of her except her feet, or rather her boots. A half-effaced remembrance of a great joy, of a bitter sorrow, had risen up within him at the sight of them, and he pondered upon it in his slow, dogged manner.

Whenever Vinska scolded him, she mostly concluded with the words: "and you are stupid, dreadfully stupid, the most stupid fellow in the whole village!" Formerly this assertion had made no impression upon him; but for some time past it had begun to annoy him; he suspected that there might be some truth in it. "Stupid," he muttered, and put his hand to his forehead, "but not quite as stupid as she thinks, thief that she is!" Not so stupid as to have forgotten everything that happened a year ago, and to be incapable of recalling and grasping more firmly a suspicion which even at that time had vaguely risen up within him.

High Mass lasted a long time; the sun was already in the zenith when the singing and the organ ceased at last, and the congregation thronged out of the church as hastily as they had thronged into it. Pavel's eyes sought only one, but could not discover her, not even when the crowd dispersed and a portion of the villagers surrounded the booths, while the rest were scattered along the village street. Vinska seemed to have disappeared, and Peter with her.

After mass Pavel ought to have gone home and driven the herd to pasture with Virgil, but he did not think of that to-day. He lounged about the neighborhood, in the fields and woods, in quest of Vinska. Impatience aggravated to rage boiled within him, and in addition, he felt the sharp pangs of hunger.

Towards evening he came to the tavern, in front of which a lively scene was being enacted. Drunken men were singing, boys were fighting, little girls were dancing in a ring to the sound of a cymbal and some fiddles which came through the open door of the tavern. Spectators crowded around the open windows of the dancing hall, watching the goings-on inside, and making their comments upon them. After a long struggle, Pavel succeeded in obtaining a place among them, and saw the couples turning about in the smoky, dimly-lighted room. Close by the window at which he stood, Peter was whirling Vinska around on one spot. He was quite befogged, and had cast aside his jacket, and with it his genteel reserve. Peter in shirt-sleeves was as common a fellow as any farm-laborer.

Vinska, in his arms, modestly cast down her eyes, and turned crimson at the words which he whispered in her ear, and the kisses which he stole.

At this sight, Pavel forgot his hunger—his impatience gave way to a torturing pain, incomprehensible to him; he writhed as if in the fangs of a wild beast, and uttered a horrible groan.

The bystanders were startled; he was hustled from their midst, and did not defend himself, but crept away, through the gathering darkness, to his dreary home. From the hut there shone the unaccustomed light of a burning candle; it was set upon the window sill, and lit up the little room, in which sat Virgil and his wife, at the bench, with a plate of roast meat and a bottle of brandy between them. The two old people were eating and drinking and in the best of spirits. Pavel watched them awhile from the edge of the field, then climbed down the high bank—the last cabins of the village being situated in quite a hollow—and stretched himself upon the broken steps of the entrance of the hovel, with his head against the door.

In this way he could not help waking, in case he should fall asleep, if Vinska tried to enter the house.

Hours passed; the dim light which the candle in the window had thrown upon the road became extinct. The drifting clouds in the sky, the veiled moon, reminded Pavel of the winter's night on which he had undertaken to liberate Milada from her captivity.

What a fool he had been then—what a fool he had remained to this day!

From the only person who had never insulted him, the only one who had ever shown him a kindness, he had turned away in distrust, and had been subject to the false girl who had fooled him, robbed him, and laughed at him, ah, yes, laughed at him, and mocked him! She was so full of mockery, that Vinska, and made sport of far more trifling things even, than his outrageous stupidity.

"What shall I do to her?" he suddenly asked himself, and answered on the spot: "I'll kill her!"

Not a thought of the consequences. Not the least fear, the slightest scruple, not even a doubt of the possibility of carrying out his resolve.

He opened the door, fetched Virgil's knotty stick from the hearth, and laid it beside him, after resuming his former place and position.

Then a great calm came over him; his eyes closed and he fell asleep. Not soundly, but half awake, as he was wont to sleep when he passed the night at the pasture with the horses.

Day was dawning when he was awakened by a light footfall, which was approaching. It was Vinska. Serene, easy and calm, with her innocently-sly expression, she came along, hesitated a moment when she saw Pavel lying in her way, then softly ascended the steps, and bent down to push him aside. Suddenly he grasped her foot, and pulled her to the ground. She fell without a sound, but immediately raised herself upon her knees, while he seized the stick. One glance at the boy's face, and her own grew ashy pale.

"Pavel," she stammered, "what do you mean—you are not going to beat me?"

She pushed him away from her with both her hands against his breast, and looked up at him in fear and trembling.

"No, I'm not going to beat you, but—I'm going to kill you," he answered, in a menacing tone, turning his head to avoid her entreating eyes—"but, first, take off my boots."

"Holy Virgin! Are you going to kill me for the boots?"

"Yes, I am."

"Don't shout so, the old folks will wake up."

"What if they do?"

She leaned against him ; a timid smile hovered on her lips. " They'll come to help me, how can you kill me then ? Come, be quiet, be a good boy !"

He tried to release himself for her embrace, which filled him at the same time with bliss and with indignation ; he felt, with anger towards himself, that his anger towards her was vanishing beneath her caresses. " You thief !" he cried.

" Hush, don't make a noise," she admonished him. " What good will it do if you call out a crowd ? Be quiet ! Kill me if you like, but be quiet—kill me, you stupid boy—" and now she was laughing, quite content, and sure of victory.

From between the tangled hair which hung over his eyes, Pavel shot at her a glance so full of gloomy fire that she shuddered anew. It was no longer a foolish boy, it was a prematurely ripe man who had looked at her and instinctively, in her fear of him, she fled—to his bosom.

" Don't hurt me ! How sorry you would be !"

She stood beside him and held his hands, which had dropped the stick. She entreated, she coaxed, she tried to move him, and was full of pity for herself. " Oh, how you would mourn for me," she said, " no one would mourn for poor Vinska like you."

" You're not poor," he cried, angrily, " not you.

You're bad—and I'm going to the district-court to have you arrested."

"For taking your boots?" she asked, with a hearty and careless laugh.

"Yes."

Vinska quickly sat down on the steps, took off the boots, and placed them before Pavel. "There they are, you miser! I don't want them! I need only say a word to Peter, and he'll get me another pair, and a finer one."

Pavel fairly roared: "No, no, take mine, keep them, I'll give them to you. Only don't go with Peter any more. Promise me!" He took her by the shoulders and shook her so that she nearly lost her breath. "Promise, promise!"

"Be quiet, I'll promise," answered Vinska, but the tone in which she said it was so little convincing, and so curious an expression passed over her features as she spoke, that Pavel clenched his fist threateningly:

"Take care!"

CHAPTER VI.

PAVEL AND HIS TEACHER.

The following week was quite rainy, and on every dull day Pavel took his books and went to school, the laughing-stock of all who met him on the way. There he sat, the only one of his age, among none but children, and always in the same place, on the last seat of the last bench. At first the master pretended not to see him; it was only after a while that he began to take notice of him again. One day, after the close of school, when all the pupils had left but Pavel, who seemed to linger purposely, Herr Habrecht asked him:

"What are you waiting for? I can't help you on in your career."

Pavel opened his eyes in astonishment, and the master continued: "Did you not tell me that you wanted to become a thief? Well, you good-for-nothing—I don't teach stealing."

Pavel's answer was on his tongue: "That isn't what I want, and I don't need to learn it, either." But he controlled himself, and merely said: "I want to learn to read and write."

"You can do so sufficiently for your needs."

"It's just for my needs that I can't do it well enough."

"You must take more pains."

"I do take pains, but I can't do it."

"Give me your book."

Pavel shook his head: "I can read from the book, but here"—he put his hand, which was trembling violently, inside of his shirt, and pulled out a crumpled letter, "the postman brought me something."

"Writing? Oh, that's a different thing; I might have trouble in reading that myself."

He repented of his jest when Pavel took it seriously, and, for the first time in his life, said very humbly: "I'd be very much obliged to you, master, if you would try."

Pavel, as it were, kissed the paper with his eyes, and then handed it to the old man, carefully, timidly, like a treasure that might be easily injured.

The master unfolded it and looked over its contents: "It is a letter, Pavel,—and do you know from whom it is?"

"I think it is from my sister, Milada, from the convent."

"No, it is not from vour sister, Milada, from the convent."

"Not?—"

"It is from your mother, from the—" he hesitated, and the boy completed his sentence with a sudden change of expression in his face, and in a hoarse voice: "From the Penitentiary."

"Would you like to hear it?"

The boy hung his head, and answered with a mute nod.

The master read:

My son Pavel.

Three months ago I put pen to paper and wrote a few lines to my daughter Milada in the convent but my daughter Milada did not get them the nuns did not give them to her they sent me word that the best thing for her would be never to hear from her mother at all so I dont know if I ought to write to you Pavel my dear son begging you to answer me whether my few lines find you and Milada your dear sister in good health as for me I am well and quite content in my place.

your mother.

My two children day and night I pray to the dear God for you, and I believe that my daughter will be a little nun when the time comes and am working hard here in this place and what I earn is laid up for my children.

MASTER HABRECHT AND THE HERDSMAN'S WIFE.—*See Page* 41.

In six years my dear son Pavel I shall come home again and I beg you both sometimes to think kindly of your mother the poorest in the world.

The writing of the letter had been stiffly and calmly traced, but at the postscript the writer's hand had evidently trembled: some large, dim spots on the paper betrayed that tears had fallen upon it. With some trouble the reader deciphered the half-effaced handwriting, and he was profoundly touched by the depth of sorrow and of love expressed in this pitiable composition.

"Pavel," he said, "you must answer this letter at once."

The lad had turned away and was staring gloomily at the floor. "How shall I answer it?" he muttered.

"Write whatever your heart prompts you to say to the unhappy woman."

Pavel's lip curled. "She is doing well," he said.

"*Well*, you stupid fellow, in prison?"

The old man was quite excited, he grew warm and eloquent; the good and fine things that he said touched his own heart, but made no impression on Pavel. He had but two answers to the master's remonstrances, which he obstinately repeated, whether they were suitable or not: "She says herself that she is doing well, and my sister does not write to her, why should I write?"

"Have you no feeling for your mother?" the master asked at last.

"No," replied Pavel.

The old man shook himself impatiently. "I remember the time when you were a child," he said, "and a good child, under the protection of your mother, who kept you at work, and was herself a good woman, only too timid, and always half cracked for fear of that infamous—Well," he interrupted himself—"everybody pitied her, even the judges felt compassion for her, and you alone, her son, have no pity on her. And why? Why is it so? I ask you, answer me, speak!" He pushed up his glasses, and bent his head so as to bring his near-sighted eyes close to Pavel's face. In the features of the latter was depicted an iron resistance; from the gloomy eyes there flashed a reflection of that determination which, fixed upon a great cause, makes the martyr.

The schoolmaster sighed, stepped back, and said: "Go, there's nothing to be done with you!" But as Pavel reached the door, he called to him to stop. "I just want to tell you one thing. You 're not as indifferent as you pretend to be; I have noticed it when people abuse you; there may come a time when you would be glad to be on good terms with people, and would like to hear them say: 'In his youth, Pavel was a good-for-nothing, but now he does very well.' For that case remember, Pavel, *remember*," he repeated, emphatically, and a faint color tinged the pale gray of his cheeks; "Don't be your own slanderer. The evil that others say of you can be doubted, can be forgotten; you can live it down. But the evil, or even only the absurd and foolish things that you say about yourself, cannot be rubbed off, they stick to you like your own skin—they will outlive you!"

He raised his hands above his head, darted about the room as aimlessly and awkwardly as a moth aroused from sleep, and whimpered and moaned: "Forget everything that I have told you, if you like; but don't forget *that* advice—I give you *that* from my own experience."

Pavel looked at the schoolmaster thoughtfully; he felt sorry for the old gentleman, but at the same time the latter seemed to him exceedingly foolish. What was he fretting about? Could it be because people called him a wizard? That *would* have been worth while!"

He would have given anything to find out, but did not know how to put the question. He remained so long regardless of the master's signs that he might go, that the latter at last said to him, gruffly:

"What are you waiting for? What do you want?" upon which he answered:

"I want to know what troubles the master."

Habrecht leaned back, drew a deep breath, and closed his eyes.

"One of these days, Pavel, one of these days; you would n't understand me now."

Then Pavel broke out: "Is it that about the witchcraft?"

An involuntary cry: "Yes, yes!" and the master seized him by the shoulders and pushed him out of the door.

So that was it! The old man was fretting about the suspicion in which he was held in the village. This seemed incomprehensibly childish to Pavel; his patron, from that hour, became a weakling in his eyes, and he left his most impressive warning unheeded. Indeed, the latter even tempted him to act in opposition to it. Let people take him for worse than he was, he wanted them to—it is only cowards who covet praise and love; but to be able to say to one's self: "I am better than any one knows," that is the true joy, even though mixed with bitterness, for a stout heart.

Pavel took great pains to spell out his mother's letter, and now that he knew what it contained, he succeeded pretty well in doing so. Vinska surprised him at this occupation, wanted to know what he was reading, and when he refused any information on the subject, tried to take the paper away from him.

"What!" she cried, angrily, as he struggled with her. "You want to forbid my keeping company with Peter, and yet you have secrets that you won't tell me! You get letters, and you hide them from me!" Her pretty brows contracted, and an irrepressibie smile hovered upon her lips. "Do you suppose I'm not jealous?"

She was joking, she was mocking him, he knew it, and—he was wildly happy that she did joke with him thus. "Yes, probably—jealous! It 's likely you 're jealous," he muttered, and a heaven opened before him at the thought of how it would be if the game she was playing with him now, should, some day, he turned to earnest. Some day! in the far, immeasurable future which still lay before him, and which he was going out to meet, if with nothing else, yet with a firm confidence in his own power.

Vinska had placed one hand on her slender hip, and stretched the other out towards him. "From whom is that letter, Pavlicek?" she asked, archly and caressingly, "that letter which you hide close to your little heart!"

"From my mother," he replied, quickly, and turned away.

Vinska uttered an exclamation of astonishment. "I wonder if it 's true! I did n't know that the folks in the penitentiary were allowed to write letters. And what could they write?—good advice, perhaps, as to how others should manage, in order to get to them and share their free quarters."

Pavel gnawed his lip in vexation.

"Throw the letter away," Vinska continued, "and don't tell anybody that you have had it; it shall not be said that letters come to us from the penitentiary. People speak ill of us enough without that."

"Not as much as you deserve, at all events," cried Pavel, vehemently, and Vinska blushed, and said somewhat disconcerted, and in a gentle tone:

"I am thinking only of your good. I sewed for you all day yesterday; I have made a new shirt for you."

"A shirt—indeed?"

"But trust to me; you ought not to have anything to do with your mother; you may believe me, she deserved the gallows more than your father; and I am sure he was right when he declared again and again in court, 'my wife persuaded me.' He never knew what he was about, he was always drunk; but *she*—ah, she was a cunning one! and it happened just as with Adam and Eve in Paradise."

She looked at him keenly askance, and encountered, in his features, an expression of intense astonishment.

"Was Adam drunk?" he asked, with curiosity.

Vinska took hold of both his ears, shook him, and laughed: "Oh, how stupid you are! we are not talking about Adam, but about your father, and that your mother persuaded him to kill the curate."

"Be quiet," cried Pavel, "you lie!"

"I'm not lying; I am only saying what I believe, and what others believe too."

"Who, who believes that?"

She answered evasively, but he grasped her arms with his big hands, drew her close to him, and repeated: "Who says that, who believes it?" until, frightened and tortured, she cried, abruptly: "Arnost!"

"Let him tell *me* so, *me*, and I'll knock out all his teeth and throw him in the brook."

"He won't say it to you, he's afraid of you—let me go; I'm afraid, too; let me go, Pavel, dear."

"Aha, you 're afraid! well, be afraid, then!" he cried, triumphant, and—disarmed. He struggled awhile with her yet, in jest, and then suddenly released her. He was richly rewarded for his generosity. Vinska looked at him tenderly and leaned her head against his shoulder for a moment. A thrill of joy passed through him, but he did not stir, and tried his best to appear indifferent.

"Pavel," said Vinska, after a while; "I have a favor to ask you, quite a small one. Will you grant it? It is something very easy."

His face grew dark. "That's what you always say; I know it very well. What do you want now?"

"The old peacock at the castle has got just a few handsome tail feathers left," she replied. "Pull them out and give them to me."

She asked in so childlike a tone, the expression of her face was so innocent, and he was thoroughly bewitched. He did not let her see it, muttered a few indistinct words, and gently pushed her aside with his elbow. Then he took the whip from the hearth, and went to the horsepond, to collect the horses of which he was to have charge at the pasture overnight.

The pasture was situated in a low tract, just outside the village, not far from the graveyard, which formed a parallelogram, and extended into the fields, surrounded by a high, whitewashed wall. The night was as warm as in summer; the moon shone in undisputed slendor, and the meadow, flooded by its light, resembled a calm sheet of water.

The horses were quietly grazing. Pavel had stretched himself out in the watchman's hut, his arms on the ground, his face leaning on his hands, and was watching his charges. The burgomaster's bay mare, with the white mane, had always been his favorite; but since he hated the burgomaster's son, he hated his bay mare as well. She came to him confidingly, trusting in their old friendship, nosed him, and blew her warm breath in his face. A curse, a hard blow of his fist on her nose, was the thanks which she earned by her caress. She retreated, more surprised than startled, and Pavel continued to threaten her with his fist. He would have liked to blot out from the world everything that had any connection with his rival. Vinska's promise inspired him with no confidence; it had been given far too hastily, entirely too much in the manner in which one quiets an importunate child.

She wanted no noise, no sensation. For some time past she had appeared so modest, and had entirely left off her former bold manner, her indifference to what people might say. The alarm and haste with which she had cried, "It shall not be said that letters come to us from the penitentiary!" still rang in Pavel's ears.

He felt as if the paper in his bosom was on fire; he grasped it and crushed it in his clenched fist.

Why did his mother want to write to him? Had she not brought shame enough upon him already? She stood between him and all others; she should not come between him and the only human being for whom he cared anything. In the depths of his heart he believed, indeed, he knew, that his mother had not done that of which she had been accused, and yet a dark instinct led him on to persuade himself: "It *may* have been so." And from the wavering doubt there grew up a firm resolution: "I won't have anything more to do with her." He tore her letter into scraps. On the last one which remained in his hand, the words were still to be read: "Your mother, the poorest in the world." "You *are* that," he was obliged to confess after all, with a touch of sadness, "you have always been that." Her tall figure rose up before his, with its gravity, its taciturnity: at night succumbing to the burden of work, of misery, of abuse; in the morning taking up her unremitting task again. He saw himself as a child beside her, spurred on by her example, almost as quiet and as familiar with misery as she. He remembered many a harsh reproof which his mother had given him, and not one expression of tenderness—but many proofs of her silent care—in particular the daily unequal division of the bread: a large piece for each child, a small one for herself.

Pavel began to collect the pieces of the letter, laid them one upon another, and looked at the heap, undecided as to what he should do with it. At last he carried it to the graveyard, and there buried it at the foot of the wall, under the drooping branches of a weeping ash.

Returning to the hut, he lay down and went to sleep, and dreamt of the fine shirt which Vinska had made for him, and which a tall woman with veiled face, clad in the dark garments of a convict, tried to take away from him. The image of that woman pursued him from that time; and if, on moonlight nights, he only gazed steadily towards the graveyard for a while, it would shape itself out of mist and vapor, and glide along past the gleaming wall. Pavel would stare at the apparition in deep horror, and think: "My mother must be dead, and her ghost has come to visit me."

He never told Vinska of this experience, nor would he have found any opportunity for so doing. She was ungracious towards him, looked at his hands whenever he came home, and said, pertly: "Thank you for the feathers!" and otherwise avoided him in evident displeasure. He felt convinced that this would not change until he had yielded to her will, and therefore concluded to fulfill her childish wish, which seemed to him an easy matter. Since Milada's departure, the gate of the castle-garden again stood open from morning till night, and the old peacock strutted past it countless times during the day.

He had retained, indeed, only some remnants of his gay summer-plumage, three splendid specimens of tail-feathers, on ridiculously long quills, not yet covered by the new growth. Pavel watched for him one day, and when he saw him coming, crept after him into the garden. Along a narrow path, hidden from the house by trees and bushes, the bird walked slowly, picking an insect from the ground here and there from mere love of sport. Suddenly, softly though Pavel crept along, he must have heard his footsteps, for he stopped, stretched his neck with a quick, wavy motion, and turned his head towards his pursuer, as if he would ask: "What do you want of me?" "You'll see in a minute," thought the lad, and when Master Peacock quickened his pace, Pavel took a couple of leaps, slipped, and fell.

Retaining his presence of mind, however, he stretched out his hand, and, with a firm, fortunate grasp, robbed the bird at once of its last adornment. It uttered a harsh cry of alarm, and turned, sprang upward, half flying, half jumping, and before the prostrate boy could think, the angry creature was sitting on his neck, pecking with its hard sharp beak at his head and temples. It hurt; but yet Pavel thought it very funny that a bird should engage in a combat with him. He laughed—though somewhat convulsively—and made a violent exertion to shake the creature off. But its claws tightened their grasp with alarming force, it spread its wings, balanced itself, and, screaming incessantly, stretched its little head far forward, seeking and threatening its enemy's eyes.

The latter became frightened. He seized the long blue neck, the feathers of which rose beneath his fingers, with both hands, and twisted it almost to a knot. The bird uttered a shrill, despairing cry, and slid over Pavel's shoulder to the ground, where it remained lying on its back, its feet drawn up and twitching. The victor had no time to convince himself whether it was dead or not, for he saw people coming from the castle; he therefore picked up the feathers from the grass, and was out of the garden in a flash. Once outside, in the road, he slackened his pace, so as not to attract by it the attention of passers-by. His heart beat violently, and he thought of the excitement which there would be in the castle at the discovery of the quivering bird. At the head of those whom its screams had attracted to the place of combat, he thought he had recognized the Baroness.

For a while Pavel continued his way unmolested, and was beginning to hope that he had escaped both suspicion and danger, when the cry of: "You gallows bird, you bad boy!" fell upon his ear, and convinced him of the contrary. A quick backward glance showed him that he was followed by the thin, round-shouldered gardener and two old workmen. "Stretch your legs, you miserable cripples," he cried, mockingly, and shot ahead, in a light, swift run.

He had a good start of his pursuers, and when he began to run, the distance lengthened between them, lengthened rapidly. He no longer cared for the attention which he attracted, but only thought of securing his booty. With glowing face and sparkling eyes, he rushed into the hut. Vinska was standing alone in the hall, and blushed for pleasure when Pavel held out the feathers to her. But when he cried, hastily: "Hide them, hide yourself!" she was greatly alarmed, and said: "What's the matter with them? I don't want them, if there's anything the matter with them!" He pressed the stolen goods upon her, pushed her into the room, and returned to the entrance of the hut, where he leaned against the door-post, folded his arms, and waited for his pursuers in a defiant spirit.

Their leader was so excited, that he could only utter his commands incoherently. "Seize him, seize the dog! To the castle with him!" he called out to his companions, two weak and peaceable individuals, who looked at each other and then at him, and then at each other again. Seize him! was that their business? They considered themselves able under-gardeners, because they would take up their rakes and scrape the paths with them as soon as they saw the Baroness approaching. The rest of the day they would lie in the grass, drinking brandy, and sometimes smoking; but most of the time they were asleep.

For Pavel it would have been mere play, and at the same time a real satisfaction, to run at the old fellows and knock them over; but for Vinska's sake, and in view of her dread of a disturbance, he denied himself this diversion, and quietly allowed himself to be taken by the collar, which the two men did timidly and without inward conviction. Their courage rose, however, at the non-resistance with which Pavel resigned himself to his fate, and a great pride awoke within them, as they led this wild boy, whom at other times they avoided from afar, a prisoner through the village. The gardener, shouting threats and abusive epithets at the top of his voice, composed the rear-guard, and the street-children kept up with the procession. "What has he done?" people asked. It is said that he has strangled something—what it was, nobody knows as yet; but *one* thing they all know: he'll be sent to States-prison, like his mother; he'll die on the gallows, like his father. Fists were clenched menacingly, stones were thrown, and missed their aim, but words, worse than stones, hit the mark. Pavel looked around boldly, and the consciousness of an inextinguishable hatred against all his fellow-creatures quickened and steeled his heart.

He entered the castle court calmly, and was at once taken into the house and to a room on the ground-floor, which had grated windows, and the door of which was locked behind him.

It was one of the company-rooms in which Pavel found himself, and his eyes had not seen, as long as they had been open, such splendor as that which surrounded him here. Heavy silk, of a lustrous green, like cats' eyes, hung at the windows and doors in folds as rich as those of Vinska's new Sunday skirt, and a number of large and small benches, with backs to them, were covered with the same stuff. On the walls hung pictures, that is to say framed dark-brown spots, from which, in different places, a white face shone out, or the livid hand of a corpse seemed to beckon. There was a large press, very much like the altar in the church, and by the window there stood a mirror, in which Pavel could see himself in the whole of his life-size raggedness. As he was looking into it, and thinking: "So *that* is how I look?" he saw, above his head, a very strange thing. It seemed to be a shallow iron tub, from which golden arms projected, and which was fastened to the ceiling by an extremely thin cord. Pavel at once sprang from under it, and looked at the evil thing suspiciously from a distance. It appeared to have no other object, nor any other intention than to fall down upon such people as were careless enough as to come within reach of it, and kill them.

After a short time footsteps were heard in the passage, the door was opened, and the baroness entered. She walked with difficulty, leaning on a cane, was very much bent, and winked her eyes constantly. She was closely followed by the schoolmaster, an expression of deep distress upon his face, and his scanty hair in such disorder, that it seemed as if he had been running his fingers though it. His awkward, jerky manners struck even Pavel, poor observer though he was.

"Where would your Grace wish to sit?" asked the old man, darting about obligingly and moving out the armchairs, in order to afford the Baroness a full view of them, and thus facilitate her choice.

"Don't trouble yourself, schoolmaster," she said, testily, and then seated herself just under the chandelier, with her back to the window, laid her cane across her lap, and ordered Pavel to come nearer.

He obeyed. The master, however, took up his position behind the chair of the Baroness, and, over her head, alternately threatened the delinquent by looks of indignation, or tried to move him and touch his heart by an expression of the deepest sorrow.

The Baroness held her hand against her forehead like a shade, and, raising her red-lidded eyes to Pavel, remarked: "You have grown tall, a big rogue. When I last saw you, you were a small one. How old are you?"

"Sixteen," he answered, absently. The iron thing hanging by the thin cord absorbed his whole attention. He seemed to see it falling and pressing the Baroness, in her seat of justice, into a flat cake.

The old lady went on: "Don't look up in the air, look at me when you are talking to me. Sixteen! Three years ago you stole my cherries, to-day you have killed my poor peacock, whom, God knows, I liked better than many a human being."

The master raised his hands, folded as in supplication, and gave the lad a sign to imitate this gesture. But Pavel did not condescend to do so.

"Why did you do it?" continued the Baroness; "answer me!"

Pavel remained silent, and the old lady's face flushed. In an excited tone she repeated her question.

Pavel shook his head; from beneath his thick, tangled hair his eyes glanced over the angry old woman, and a faint smile curled his lips.

At this the Baroness lost her self-control. "Impudent fellow!" she cried, then seized her cane, and with it gave him a blow on each shoulder.

"That's right," thought Pavel, "blows again, and nothing but blows," and he sent up a silent prayer to the thing of iron: "If you would only fall down, if you would only fall on her head!"

Habrecht, behind the Baroness' back, made a bow which expressed approbation: "Your Grace has given Holub Pavel a tangible reprimand," he observed. "That was well; a very good preparation for the examination, to which, with your Grace's permission, I will now proceed."

The old lady did not feel comfortable after her act of violence. She had expended all her anger at once, and was now under the spell of a far more unpleasant feeling: a querulous, sentimental indignation. "What is there to examine?" she asked; "the bad boy has killed my peacock, and will not say why, because he would have to say that he did it from spite."

"It must be so! Yes, certainly!" said the master, in corroboration. "When the poor peacock was discovered, his last tail-feathers were gone; and I'm sure that bad boy had pulled them out—from spite!"

"Now that is very foolish, master!" interrupted the Baroness, testily. "If the boy—like many other silly boys before him—had only pulled out some of the poor peacock's feathers, that would be no proof of spite—it would have been foolishness and theft."

"Ah, how true!" replied Habrecht, "foolishness and theft. That's just it, exactly, your Grace."

"Is it so? Who knows?"

"Who, indeed, except your Grace, who has thrown a light on the matter at once. Pulling out feathers! Yes, indeed. The feathers were what the boy wanted; he irritated the peacock by trying to get them, and thus gave rise to a struggle which proved fatal to the poor bird."

As the raven of Odin bends to the ear of the latter, so Habrecht bent to the Baroness' ear and whispered: "Not without leaving traces of his valor on the enemy. Your Grace will have the goodness to observe that the lad's forehead is cut in various places, and quite bloody."

"Indeed? indeed—it seems so to me."

"Speak, Holub Pavel," cried the master, standing erect again, "excuse yourself. You wanted the feathers, you stupid boy; you had no malicious intention?"

"Speak!" the Baroness, too, commanded him. "Did some one tell you to steal the feathers? for, after all," she added, after a moment's reflection, "what could *you* have done with them?"

"Certainly; what? Such a beggar, with peacock's feathers."

At every mention of the word feathers, a shiver ran through the lad; but when the master attacked him with the question:

"Who told you to do it? wasn't it that minx of a Vinska?" he was seized with a mortal fear of the evil consequences which this suspicion might have for the herdsman's daughter, and, firmly resolved to avert it from her, he said, in a low voice:

"No one told me to do it; I did it from spite."

The Baroness struck the floor violently with her cane, and rose. "There you have it," she said to the schoolmaster, "just listen to him; you might as well give him up; he is lost."

"May your Grace have pity!" entreated the old man. "Do not believe him. The senseless idiot is lying so as to make himself out a knave; the simpleton does not know what he is doing, your Grace!"

She beckoned to him to be silent, and came close to Pavel. Her weary eyes surveyed the lad with a sorrowful expression.

"And this is the brother of my dear child," she said, with a deep sigh. "As often as the child writes to me, and as often as I see her, she asks: 'How is my Pavel? When is my Pavel coming to see me?' She knows that I do not wish to have anything to do with him; I have said so, and shall hold to my word, and yet the child still asks."

Pavel had started, he opened his eyes wide, his nostrils quivered:

"What child? Milada?"

"'When is my Pavel coming to see me?'" repeated the Baroness excitedly, touched, and struggling with tears. "But can I send you to her, you thief, you bad boy, the worst boy in the whole village? Can I do it?"

"Send me," said Pavel in a low tone.

The master drew up his shoulders, pushed his chin forward, and made the most impressive signs to him: "'Will your Grace have the kindness, I beg most respectfully, your Grace!' *that* is the way to say it."

But Pavel tortured his clasped fingers, his bosom rose and fell in gasps, and with a dry sob he said once more: "Send me!"

The Baroness turned to the master: "That seems to make an impression on him."

"It has made an extraordinary impression. Your Grace has hit the right thing with this wise decision."

"Decision? there is no question of any decision as yet."

Ignoring the objection, the master continued: "That innocent child will succeed better than any one else in influencing him for good, the child—"

"That child," interrupted the Baroness, "is the pride and the darling of the whole convent."

"Your Grace sees?—and what could be more salutary and inciting for the neglected boy than the sight of his well-behaved sister, than her example, her admonitions?"

"It may be," replied the old lady, thoughtfully. "And therefore we will try it, in God's name. It is a last resort. If that fails, I give you my word at his next offence he will no longer be brought to *me* for judgment, but will be taken to the district-court."

"Do yon hear?" cried the master, and Pavel muttered an unjustified "Yes." In reality, he hardly knew what or whether anything had been said, since the hope had been held out to him of seeing his Milada once more. The unattainable goal of his years of longing was suddenly brought near him; his most burning desire, relinguished with a thousand pangs, had suddenly been fulfilled in the most unexpected manner. His heart throbbed with joy, he uttered a jubilant cry, which he could not suppress, and turning on his heel, he said: "And now I'm going to see Milada!"

"Halt!" cried the Baroness, "are you crazy? You can't go and see Milada in such an offhand manner. You will go home now, and on Saturday you will come to the castle and get a letter. You will take that to the convent and on that occasion you *may* see your sister."

"Of course I shall be sure to see her, if I'm only once there!" said Pavel, rolling up his sleeves with an involuntary gesture.

"Don't be too sure," rejoined the Baroness. She had grown tired, and made a move to resume her former seat. Suddenly Pavel sprang at her, thrust her aside, and pushed the armchair out of the range of the chandelier. "There," he cried, "now you can sit down."

The old lady had been in danger of falling, when, instead of finding the support which she sought, she received a push. With a cry of alarm, she clung to the arm which was held out to her with the deepest respect by the master, who led her to her seat, and then, trembling with indignation, raised his clenched fist at Pavel.

"What are you about? What do you mean, you scoundrel?"

Pavel quietly pointed to the cord of the chandelier:

"If that little cord should break, she 'd be killed," he said.

"Ass, donkey! go, away with you!" cried Habrecht, and the lad obeyed without losing any time in leave-taking.

The Baroness grew calm by degrees, and said:

"He is dreadfully stupid, but he had at least a good intention."

"No doubt of that," said the master—"if your Grace had only not been so startled!"

"What of that? That does not signify." She took out her pocket-handkerchief, and pressed it to her forehead. "What is worse, far worse, is the fact that I have been very inconsistent again. How often have I told myself: Matilda must never see her brother again, that's positive! and now I am sending him to her myself. I have no will-power left, no energy—the slightest occasion offers, and my firmest resolution comes to nought."

"That is a sign of old age, your Grace," observed Habrecht, in a tone of courteous excuse; "your Grace can't help that. We all change. Just consider, your Grace, even the teeth with which, in our youth, we could crack the hardest nuts, we may break on a crust of bread when we are old."

"A disgusting comparison," replied the Baroness; "pray spare me such disgusting comparisons in future, schoolmaster."

CHAPTER VII.

PAVEL VISITS MILADA.

During the night between Saturday and Sunday Pavel did not close his eyes. He lay as if in a fever, constantly thinking that some one might come at any moment to take back the letter which the Baroness had given him in the evening, and which was to procure him admission to the convent. She might have changed her mind, might have repented of her kindness. Pavel drew himself up on his miserable bed, and formed wild resolutions for the case that his fears should be realized.

At last the day dawned, and Pavel's own fancies remained his only oppressors. Nevertheless, he was not free from anxiety. As early as four o'clock he was at the well, washing himself from head to foot, and then put on his shirt and trousers, as well as his coat, which had experienced a great embellishment. On its most threadbare spot, just over the wearer's heart, there was displayed a gay patch, a piece of stuff, as large as his hand, which had been left over in the cutting out of Vinska's new bodice. Pavel resolved to rip it off and give it to little Milada, if she should like it as well as he did.

And so he started full of vigor and joyful anticipation, and met not a soul in the whole village. He passed along the wall of the castle-garden with special haste, and then his way led him up-hill and down-hill, with the constant anxious thought: "If only they don't come after me to call me back!"

When he had reached the hill from which, nearly two years before he had followed with his eyes the carriage which was bearing his sister away, he breathed more freely. He remembered how, on that day, he had seen the spires of the city glistening in the distance. To-day they were wrapped in autumn mists, which concealed them from his eyes. And in the fields, which at that time had been decorated with the tender green of the young blades, there now lay great clods, turned over by the plough, whose share had left a glitter of metal upon them. He went on, often lost sight of his goal, but followed it with the instinct of an animal; it did not occur to him that he could miss it.

He had been walking three hours when he heard distinctly, for the first time, the striking of a clock on one of the church-towers, and, soon after, he reached the small houses of one of the suburbs.

The bridge, which he had often heard spoken of, lay before him, and beneath it there rushed along a mighty torrent, mightier than he had thought it possible that there could be one on earth. And this wonderful river, which he gazes at in astonishment, Milada can see every day, Pavel thinks; and he is seized with pride in his sister, and deference for her.

At the end of the bridge sits an old woman, selling apples. He feels sure that Milada is as fond of apples as she used to be—what if he should take her a few? The apple-vender turns her back to him; she is examining the box in which she keeps her stock; it would be an easy thing to purloin a few. Should he, or should he not? An inner voice warns him: "Stolen goods are no longer fit for Milada." He stands and hesitates.

Just then the old woman turns, sees him, praises her goods, and invites him to buy.

"I have no money," says Pavel, hesitating.

The apple-woman's complaisance vanishes, and her bidding now is: "If you have no money, you had better take yourself off!"

That is the accustomed sound; it gives Pavel rather a home-like feeling, and he asks, quite confidingly, where the convent is.

"What do you want at the convent?" mutters the woman. "You ought to have come yesterday. They distribute on Saturdays."

Pavel tells a lie; he does not know himself why, and declares that he is aware of that, repeats his inquiry, and, after receiving the desired information, walks towards a house, which, resembling a gigantic yellow box, rises up before him on the opposite side of the square. It has remarkably small windows, and a narrow door at one side, to which some steps lead down. He stands before it helplessly, knocks, shakes the door-knob, but the latter remains immovable and his knocking unheard. A band of little boys comes along; one of them jumps down the steps to the convent door, seizes the bell-pull, lets it snap back suddenly, and runs away. A ringing that seemed endless resounded from inside the house; the door opened. Pavel entered, and again found himself before a closed door, but the latter had a glass window, through which could be seen a hall, with a rather low vaulted roof, supported by columns, and walls that were covered with damp spots. A nun appeared, eyed the visitor keenly, and asked, with a stern look: "Why do you ring so loudly? what do you want?"

"My sister, Milada," stammered Pavel. It came over him all at once that he was under one roof with his sister, and his impatience became intolerable. "Where is she?" he cried.

"Whom do you mean?" asked the nun. "There is no Milada here, you must have made a mistake."

She was about to send him away, when he remembered the talisman which he had in his possession, and gave her the letter.

The sister looked at the superscription awhile. "I see," she said. "My dear boy, your sister's name with us is Maria. You cannot see her just now, she is in church."

Pavel declared that he would go to the church, too, and his face, at the same time, assumed so resolute and evil an expression, that the portress became alarmed. She took pains to make him understand that he must wait until mass was over, and led him for that purpose to a room adjoining the hall, left him alone there, and locked the door.

So he was a prisoner. The gloomy apartment in which he found himself had no second entrance, but instead, three windows, guarded by heavy, bulging iron bars. These opened upon a grass-plot, planted with fruit-trees, in the midst of which stood a statue of the virgin, weather-beaten and gray with age, and with a gay wreath of flowers upon its head. Pavel thought at once that no one could have twined that but Milada. If she would only come, come soon; if mass would only come to an end! The sound of a bell was heard, they were ringing for the Sanctus; then followed the Consecration. Pavel fell on his knees and prayed fervently: "Oh, dear Lord, send my sister to me!" He longed, he hoped, he waited—the bell had long since rung for the Benediction, the little one did not appear. And it was as quiet all around him as in an empty church. Not a soul to be seen in the garden, not a sound, not a step to be heard in the hall. Pavel threw himself against the door, and thumped and kicked at it as long as he could. In vain; no one came to release him. Exhausted and in despair, he sank upon the floor beside a large table, which, with a few chairs set against the wall, composed the entire furniture of the apartment.

"She don't come, she don't come, and they have locked me in and forgotten me," this he said to himself, at first with hot indignation at something abominable and unheard of, finally with a dull resignation to the inevitable. His head grew more and more heavy, his eyes closed, he fell asleep. He slept so soundly, so deeply, that he was not awakened when the door was suddenly thrown open, that he regained consciousness only when two little arms clung around his neck, when a dear, beloved voice cried, joyfully :

"Pavel, dearest Pavel, have you come at last?"

He opened his eyes wide, jumped up, stared, turned scarlet, would have liked to say something and could not—burned to take her to his heart, and dared not. Ah, he had fancied his sister beautiful, very beautiful, but *so* beautiful as she appeared to him in reality, he never could have imagined her.

She wore a dark blue dress, the cut of which somewhat resembled that of a priest's surplice, and, on her breast, a silver cross. Her fair hair was confined in a braid, which hung down her back to her waist; but on her forehead, at her temples, and at the back of her neck the short hairs, having waywardly escaped the smoothing hand, formed tiny, delicate, golden curls, and surrounded her head like a halo.

The admiration with which Pavel gazed at the child grew more and more timid; suddenly tears dimmed his eyes; he raised his arm and pressed it to his face.

This singular reception staggered the little girl for a while, but she soon embraced her brother anew, and under her caresses dispelled the feeling of estrangement which had come over him at the sight of her. He sat down, took her on his lap, kissed and fondled her, and listened to all she had to tell him, wanted to know most particularly how she lived, how she occupied herself, what she studied, and, above all things—what she had to eat. He was astonished at the small value which she set on that important matter, and that she seemed to care for nothing so much as for being the best girl in the whole convent-school, and for having this fact acknowledged.

"It is hard to be the best, because there are so many good girls; but I *am* the best, for all that," she said, then drew herself up joyfully, and cried, more in a tone of conviction than of interrogation: "You are good, too?"

"I?" replied Pavel, full of honest surprise, "how should I be good?"

Without removing her clasped fingers from his neck, she stretched out her arms, leaned back, looked into his eyes, and said:

"*How* should you be good? Why, just—just as everybody is good; by not doing anything wrong. I hope you don't do anything wrong?"

He shook his head and tried to extricate himself from her, and especially to avoid her eye: "Why should I not do wrong things?" he muttered; "there is no other way—"

"And what wrong do you do, for instance?"

"For instance? I take things from people."

"What things?"

"What questions you ask! What should I take? what I have always taken—fruit, turnips, or wood."

With increasing alarm, but still doubting, the little girl cried out:

"Why, then you are a thief!"

"That's what I am.'

"That's not true! say that it's not true, that you are not bad, for God's sake, say so!"

She threatened, coaxed, and was disconcerted when he made the excuse:

"How can I help being bad? our parents were bad, too."

"Just because of that," she cried, "don't you understand? just because of that I am the best girl in the whole school, and you ought to be the best boy in the whole village, so that God will pardon our parents, so that their souls may be saved. Think of father's soul, where that is now."

A sudden pallor passed over her rosy cheeks like a breath. "We must pray all the time," she continued, "pray and do good works, and with each good work say to ourselves: 'For the poor soul that is burning in purgatory.'"

In a tone of the deepest conviction Pavel assented: "Yes, I'm sure it is burning."

"O God in heaven!—and do you know what I think?" whispered the child: "If we do wrong, it burns harder than ever, because God thinks to himself: 'That comes of the evil example that these children have had from—'" She stopped, swallowed several times in succession, her eyes opened wide, and rested on her brother, full of passionate sorrow. Suddenly she seized his head with both hands, pressed her face to his, and asked:

"Why do you steal?'

"Nonsense," he replied, "let me be.'

She clung to him still closer, and cried, beseechingly: "Tell me, tell me!" and when he would not answer, she began to question him. "Can it be that you steal from hunger? Are you, perhaps, hungry sometimes?"

He smiled composedly: "I am always hungry."

"Always!"

"But I don't always think of it," he said, attempting to quiet her, as she broke out in lamentation at his answer. The child, however, did not listen to him, but ran from the room, reproaching herself violently.

Soon she returned, followed by a lay-sister, who carried a plate loaded with meat and bread. The latter was placed upon the table, and Pavel invited to help himself.

He did honor to the invitation, ate quickly, and was satisfied in a surprisingly short time.

"Is that all your appetite?" asked the sister, looking at him kindly with her bright young eyes; "you're not used to eating, you're easily satisfied, I know all about that. Where did he come from, who is he?" she asked, turning to Milada.

"He came from home," replied the latter; "he is my brother."

"Well, yes; in Christ, every poor man is our brother in Christ."

"I don't mean that, he is my real brother!" asserted Milada, and she grew quite angry when the sister admonished her in the first place not to lose her temper, and in the second not to tell an untruth, even in jest.

"But I'm not telling an untruth, sister Philippine! ask the Reverend Mother, ask the sister Portress," said the child, earnestly. But the lay-sister answered, in good-natured remonstrance:

"Be quiet, Fräulein Maria, don't be unruly, you have not been unruly in a long time. Don't go back to your old faults, else I shall have to report you; you know very well that I should be obliged to report you."

With this she hastily took the plate from the table, nodded cheerily to the children for good-bye, and left the room.

"She would not believe that I am your brother," said Pavel, after awhile.

Milada laid her cheek against his again, and whispered in his ear: "Perhaps she believes it, after all."

"Believes it, after all? Why does she pretend not to, then? and why did n't you speak your mind more plainly? Why did you give up at once? I keep quiet when I'm in the right, because I am glad that people are so stupid, and that I can think to myself: 'you asses!' but you don't need to do that."

"Yes, I, keep quiet too, not from pride and defiance, like you, but from humility and self-control,—" she drew herself up, and her little face was radiant with self-satisfaction,—"so that the angels in heaven can take pleasure in me."

After she had enjoyed for awhile the admiration with which he gazed at her, she continued: "Pavel, I am not allowed to write to our mother, but you must write to her; write that I pray for her all the time, and do not want to be anything but a saint. Yes, and write to her that I think of her always, and deny myself something every day for her, and do at least one good work for her each day; and you, Pavel,—" she interrupted herself, took him by both shoulders, and asked: "What do you do for mother?"

"I?" was his answer. "I don't do anything."

"Nonsense! You must do something!"

"What should I do? I don't know what."

"I'll tell you, then. You must think of what mother is to do when she comes home: where shall she go to, where shall she live, poor mother?"

And then Milada unfolded a ready-made plan, to the effect that Pavel should buy some land, and build a house for their mother.

He was vexed. "How should I build a house?" he said, "I have no money."

"But I have some!" cried the child. "Wait, I'll get it for you—just stay there in your chair and wait."

She flew away quickly, but a long time passed before she returned. She was followed by the portress, who kept a keen eye upon an article which Milada carried in her hand.

"Stop," said the nun, "what are you going to do with that?"

"I am going to give it to my brother. I have permission from the Reverend Mother."

The portress looked at the child disapprovingly, and slowly left the room with soft, inaudible steps.

Milada triumphantly waved a knit bag, through the openwork stitches of which shone the gleam of silver. It contained her savings, her weekly allowance from the Baroness, which she had conscientiously put aside, thirty-four florins in all. That it was not sufficient to buy land and build a house, was plain even to Pavel, ignorant of business-matters though he was; but it was a beginning, it was property, which held out the hope of adding to it, of increasing it. The children consulted how this was to be done, and Milada soon suggested that her brother should work hard and earn money.

But Pavel said: "How should I earn anything? As long as I am with the herdsman, I can't earn anything. But!" he cried, "but if—" an idea had come to him, and this unusual occurrence threw him into a feverish excitement—"if I could stay here; they have a farm, the nuns. If they would give me something to do on the farm."

"On the farm?" asked Milada, opening her eyes wide.

"If they would only give me a place with the oxen, or the horses, or the cows," he continued, "or something of the kind, so that I could stay here, and would not have to go back to the village."

He seized her hands, and entreated her to plead his cause with the nuns. After his sluggish fancy had once begun to spread its wings, it flew steadily onward and bore him higher and higher. He would make so excellent a farm-servant, that it would not be long before he would be promoted to be overseer, and finally farmer. With the money which he earned he would build a house in the village for their mother. She could live there, he would stay near his sister, and then he would see her and talk with her often, just as he was doing to-day, and if that should ever come to pass, he would be happy, would be good, and there would be an end to badness, an end to stealing, an end to—Pavel clenched his fist at some imaginary being; he had intended to say to Vinska, but it suddenly seemed to him as if he ought not to pronounce that name before Milada. The child nestled close to him, made no objections and sometimes gave an additional touch of light to the pleasing picture which he was sketching.

"Yes, you shall be the farmer, and I'll be the saint," the child had just cried, joyfully, when there was heard, at first at a distance and then nearer, the sound of a bell, loud and long continued. Milada sighed deeply.

"The signal," she said.

"What signal?"

"That you must go."

"But I'm not going! You said yourself that

I could stay," cried Pavel, and the little girl replied, in a tone of dismay:

"What are you thinking of? I can't say such a thing."

Now the bell resounded just outside the door, the latter opened, the portress appeared, did not say anything, but moved the bell, which she held in her hand, more and more rapidly.

At the same time sister Philippine approached with hasty steps, and called out to Pavel:

"The reception hour is over, it is high time, say good-bye, go on, off with you!"

He gave no answer, nor did he obey. The lay-sister repeated her order. Pavel, however, remained seated, his head bent, pressing and pulling the fingers of one hand with those of the other. The portress called a second lay-sister, ordered her likewise to remove the intrusive lad, and beckoned to Milada to leave the room. The girl hesitated. The nun approached her and took her by the arm.

"You will go up to the school-room," she said, making the utmost effort to control the trembling of her voice, and to conquer the child's resistance by gentleness. But displeasure flashed from her dark eyes, and the words which she whispered to the little girl, were apparently, judging from the effect which they produced, not very kind ones.

Milada listened to them with fixed, anxious attention, suddenly cried, "Good-bye!" and hastened away.

At this he jumped up, pushed the lay-sisters, who tried to hold him, aside, and rushed after Milada into the hall. "Stay," he cried; "have you forgotten what we agreed upon, what is to be done? Stay here and tell the nuns about it."

He grew more and more unruly, and threatened the lay-sisters, who began to take measures to remove him by force. The peaceful convent-hall stood in danger of becoming the scene of a small hand-to-hand conflict, when the door leading into the garden opened, and gave admission to a long procession of nuns, the superior, between the two dignitaries next in rank, at its head. A gentle smile upon her handsome face, her large, clear eyes fixed upon the excited portress with an expression of mild surprise, the Reverend Mother came to the door of the reception-room, and stopped before it. The portress suddenly seemed petrified, the lay-sisters courtesied down to half their natural size, Milada made a low bow, leaned her head on her shoulder, blushed and then turned pale.

"What is the matter? What is going on here?" asked the superior, and the pure metallic tone of her voice was as gratifying to the ear, as the sight of her noble features was pleasing to the eye. "Why has our little Maria not yet returned to the class-room?"

The portress gave a somewhat confused explanation of the scene which had just taken place; she did not spare Pavel in doing so, and the Reverend Mother listened to her with no more impatience than an angel might have betrayed, and let her eye rest upon the accused with the sympathy of one.

"You wish to speak to the nuns?" she said to him; "speak then, my child, the nuns are here."

Pavel trembled with rapture and joyful hope at these kind words; but it was not in his power to do as she told him. Timidly he looked up at the august lady as she stood before him, so bright and adorable in her sombre garments, and it seemed to him as if he had looked into the face of the Holy Virgin herself, and as his eye, in falling, glanced over her hands, he thought he saw the key of Heaven glistening between the slender fingers clasped over her girdle. As if he had been seized and thrown down by a powerful hand, he suddenly fell upon his knees, and his lips murmured, in a low and fervent tone:

"Help me! Help me!"

The next moment his sister was kneeling beside him, and also began to cry, only louder and more boldly than he: "Help him! Help him! O Reverend Mother, I pray you, help him!"

The superior made a restraining gesture. She held out both hands to Milada, raised her, and said: "I do not know what you want, and that is not the way to ask for anything. You too, boy, rise and say properly what you have to say."

Pavel rose at once; his cheeks were dark crimson, drops of perspiration stood at the roots of his hair, he tried to speak, but uttered only a hoarse and inarticulate murmur.

"You may speak for him; what does he want?" said the superior, turning to Milada.

"He would like so much to stay here," replied the child, in a low dejected voice. "He wants to be a farm-servant, and take care of the horses and the cows."

The Reverend Mother smiled, and all the nuns in her train, the tall and the short, the stout and the thin, the kindly and the stern, smiled likewise.

"Where did he get that idea? Did any one send him here? Sister Stewardness, is there a place vacant in the farm-department?"

"None," replied the nun whom she addressed.

Pavel imagined that he had seen a look of intelligence exchanged between the too ladies, when the superior asked anew:

"But, perhaps the farmer is thinking of discharging one of the men? Possibly the lad has heard of it before we have been informed of it; could not that happen?"

"No. I am positive that the farmer has no idea of discharging any of the men."

"Indeed?" replied the superior; "well, then, my child, there is nothing to be done; whoever sent you to us was wrongly informed. Go home then, my son, and God be with you, and you, little Maria, go to the class-room!—to the class-room!"

She turned away, and was about to pass on. Pavel threw himself in her way; reverent awe had bound his tongue hitherto, the agony of despair loosened it.

"For God's sake, gracious, blessed mother," he cried, grasping the dress of the reverend lady, "for God's sake let me stay here! do not send me back to the village! my Milada says that I must try to be good, I cannot be good in the village. Here I will be, keep me here. In the village I am a thief, and have to be a thief."

"Child, child, what are you saying?" replied the superior. "No one has to be a thief, every one can earn his bread honestly."

"Not I!" shouted Pavel, as he struggled with all his might against two nuns who had come forward and were trying to extricate the Superior's dress from his grasp, "Not I! All that I earn, Virgil takes from me and spends in drink, and I have to do all his work besides my own, and get nothing for it; and when Virgilova goes and tells them: 'The boy has no shirt, the boy has no jacket,' *they* say: 'And we have no money;' but when they want to go hunting, or to the tavern, they always have plenty of money."

The Superior shook her head incredulously, and made objections, which Pavel refuted. The taciturn boy worked himself up to a true eloquence that was bluntly to the point. What he advanced was not the fruit of long reflection; the perception of his whole misery came to him at the same time with that of the possibility of a deliverance from that misery, and every new accusation against his cruel foster-mother,—the parish,—every fresh outbreak of indignation and grief, he closed with the passionate entreaty: "Keep me here! Don't send me back to the villiage!" But—whether his eyes fixed themselves in hope or in anxiety upon the exalted lady to whom he ascribed the power to change his wretched fate into a happy one,—he always met the same expression of gentle inexorability. And as she gazed before her, ineffably pious, ineffably indifferent, her whole retinue followed her example, and

Pavel, dull of comprehension though he was, understood at last that he had asked in vain.

"Go, my child," said the Superior. "Go in God's name, and remember that wherever you are, you are under His eye and His protection. And if He is with us, what can men do against us? what harm can their evil example do us, and what the temptation into which their evil example leads us? Go in peace, my child, and may God go with you!"

She made a sign to the portress, who hastened to open the door of the hall. Silently, without any farewell salutation, Pavel went towards the entrance. Suddenly a piercing cry was heard. Milada, who until then had stood motionless, without once raising her eyes, or her head, meekly bent to one side, ran after Pavel: "Wait, I will go with you!" she cried, clung to his neck, kissed him and sobbed: "Poor Pavel! Poor Pavel?" Quite beside herself, she struck with her little clenched fists at the nuns, who approached her and admonished her, with gentle, soothing words, to be quiet. She panted, entreated piteously: "Let me be! I want to go with him, because he is poor, because he is a thief. Don't you see, don't you see? he is in rags, he has nothing to eat. I want to be in rags too; I want to have nothing to eat too; I don't want to be a saint and go to heaven, if he has got to go to hell!"

She screamed as if she would forcibly burst her breast, and he, struggling between his consternation at her vehemence and his joy at this unexpected expression of her affection, stared at her, abashed, gratified and thoroughly at a loss what to do, and did not stir, when the nuns surrounded him and Milada, loosened the child's arms from his neck, and, holding her hands and feet, lifted her up. This was done with the greatest forbearance, without the slightest sign of impatience; deep sorrow, serious regret, was all which was expressed in the features of the pious sisters as their charge still continued her energetic resistance.

"Pavel," shrieked the girl, "Pavel, tear me away from them! Let us go away, far away—let us work together again, in the brickyard, as we used to when we were little children. I will look after you, so that you will no longer be a thief. Tear me away! Take me with you! Don't go away alone! I shall never see you again if you go away alone—they will never let me see you again—never again!"

Her shrieks ended in undistinguishable sounds, in a hoarse cough. Pavel groaned. The little one's cry for help cut him to the heart, and yet he remained sufficiently unbiassed to think: "What she asks is nonsense; what she thinks she can do is far beyond her strength." At last she was silent, as he supposed, from exhaustion. He could not see her—the barrier which the nuns formed between him and her had gradually become three and fourfold. Instead of the overstrained voice of his sister, the lad heard another, steady, clear as a bell, which admonished, exhorted, unvarying and impressive, and growing lower and lower. Pavel held his breath and listened; the little one remained quiet. Only sometimes he heard her sigh from the depths of her grief-torn bosom, and it seemed to him as if, in so doing, she pronounced his name. He could stand it no longer; he rushed forward to break the ranks which deprived him of the sight of his sister. He had expected opposition, and met with none. As if a signal had been given, the nuns stepped back, on either side, and he saw Milada standing before him, her hand in that of the Superior, pale, trembling, her head again a little on one side, her reddened eyes—eyes reddened for him—cast down. He was seized with an almost unconquerable desire to take her in his arms and fly with her. The door was open, a few bounds and he would be out of doors, and, once outside, the nuns might run after him forever. "But after that? Where should I take the child?" flashed through his head, and the answer was: "To misery!" and he overcame the temptation which had seized upon him so suddenly and vehemently.

"Come nearer," said the Superior; "take leave of your sister."

He did as she told him, and added, assuming a sovereign power of his own: "I'll come again next Sunday."

Milada burst into tears again, and whispered, without looking up: "May he?"

"I cannot tell you that beforehand," replied the Reverend Mother; "it does not depend upon me, but upon you, on your behavior. Your brother will always be allowed to come when you are good, and obedient, and"—she laid particular stress upon these words—"not impatient."

"You see, now," cried Pavel, joyfully. The condition which was attached to his meeting his sister again contained for him the most comforting promise. He could not understand why Milada shook her head sadly and incredulously when, kissing and embracing her, he promised certainly to return in a week. And when the little girl had been taken away, and he, at the command of the portress, had left the hall, and was standing in the square outside the convent, he laughed to himself. He laughed at the foolish child, who had borne a separation from him cheerfully for years, and now, when they were parting only for a week, was so bitterly grieved about it. Poor child, how she loved him! How could he ever have dreamt that she loved him so much! She would have been ready to give up everything for him: the beautiful house in which she lived, her nice clothes, her good food, even the sure prospect of going to Heaven.

He would repay her for that, he knew how: he would make himself worthy of her love. He was filled with joyous pride, with the most glorious confidence, his heart swelled with something wonderful, incomprehensible. He did not account to himself for it, he would not have known what to call it, it was so new, so strange to him, it was—happiness! Under the influence of the miracle which was being worked within him, he could not help expecting to witness outward miracles. And as he walked along slowly, the dreams he wove shaped themselves more and more distinctly into the conviction that he was drawing near to a great change in his destiny, the mysterious beginning of a fairer, better life.

He had been walking an hour, and had hardly accomplished one quarter of the distance, when he was overtaken by a messenger, who was also on his way from the town to the village; an old acquaintance, the night watchman, Wendolin Much by name. This man was sent early every Sunday morning by the Baroness to the convent. He carried the allowance for Milada, a letter for the Superior and presents for her poor people, and had to bring back the weekly report regarding the protege of the noble lady. To the one which the Reverend Mother sent to-day, the following lines had been hastily added:

" The meeting of the two children has not had the result expected. On the contrary, it stirred up anew the drop of vagabond blood which unfortunately flows in the veins of our darling. We fear that a long time must pass before we can succeed in effacing the unfavorable impression which this first meeting with her brother has had upon Maria, and if your Grace will take our advice, you will also let it be the last."

CHAPTER VIII.

PAVEL'S NEW HOME.

When Pavel reached home, late in the afternoon, he saw Virgilova standing at the beginning of the village street, evidently on the watch for him. She called to him from a distance, welcomed him cordially, and asked how he had fared. He answered in monosyllables, looked askance at the old woman suspiciously, and thought: "What does the old witch want of me?"

His uncertainity as to her intentions did not last long; the obstinacy with which she kept at his heels, her remonstrances, eagerly and anxiously reiterated: "Wait a minute! don't run so!" put him on the right scent, the old woman wanted to keep him away from the hut; something was going on in the hut which he was not to witness. The suspicion had hardly arisen, when he started on a trot, soon reached the place, pushed the door open violently, and sprang into the hall. His first glance was directed towards the room. There sat Vinska on the bed, finely and neatly dressed, holding her hands before her face and sobbing. In front of her stood Peter, with the mien of a condemned criminal, scarlet in the face, and his hat, decorated with the peacock's feathers, pushed far back on his forehead.

When Pavel appeared on the threshold, Vinska rose quickly: "Have you come back?" she cried. "What do you want? What are you looking for?"

He looked gloomily and wrathfully at the feathers on Peter's hat, and answered: "Did you give him those?"

For the duration of a breath Vinska was confused, but the son of the burgomaster drew himself up. "How does the dog dare?" he said. "What is it to you? Be off!"

Pavel straddled his legs, and planted them firmly on the floor, as if he were trying to grow to it. "I did not steal those feathers for you," he retorted. "They belong to Vinska; give them back to Vinska!"

Peter turned his head without raising it, roared a long-drawn-out: "Take care!" and raised his fist to strike Pavel. At the same moment Vinska slipped into his arm, and leaned against him with all the force of her robust, yet delicately formed figure. She dried upon his shoulder a tear which still remained upon her cheek. "Don't hurt him," she said, "he doesn't know anything," she said, "he is so stupid!"

"Who?" asked Pavel, and drops of cold sweat started upon his forehead.

"Hear him ask!" replied the girl, "and now listen and mark my words. What belongs to me, belongs to him, too." She touched Peter's breast with her finger. "I don't have to give him anything, because I belong to him myself, body and soul. And as long as he'll keep me, it's all right, and when the time comes when he don't want me any more, I'll jump in the well."

The burgomaster's son repeated his former "Take care!" but this time it was addressed to his sweetheart; his threat included a tender reproach, and though he stood there stout and self-conscious, and she leaned against him helplessly and full of devotion, she appeared the stronger of the two.

"Scold as much as you like," she said, with a sigh, "I know that I'll have to jump in the well, after all; my lover can't marry me, poor girl that I am."

"Marry, he—you!" Pavel burst into a coarse laugh. "Marry you? Is that what you expected?"

"Never!" replied Vinska, sadly. "I never thought anything. But he's my first lover; I'll get clear of him; so many girls get clear of their first lovers. But now I see that I can't do it, and if

I should be told to-day: 'Peter is going to obey his father and marry that rich Miloslava,' I wouldn't say a word, and just go and drown myself."

"Girl! girl!" cried Peter, stamping his foot, then seized her pretty round head with both hands, and pressed a wild, passionate kiss upon her lips.

Pavel rushed from the hut.

Outside he shook himself, as if he had got into a swarm of hornets, and was trying to rid himself of the poisonous insects which were attacking him on all sides. Then, tired as he was, he began to wander restlessly about the village. That Vinska, in spite of the promise which he had extorted from her, had remained Peter's sweetheart, that—he tried to persuade himself, he no longer cared for. But, that she, the daughter of the drunkard Virgil and his despised wife, had aimed at becoming the wife of the burgomaster's son, *that* appeared to him unpardonable and outrageous; she could not fail to be punished for it, and deserved nothing better than to have to drown herself.

At this thought, he was seized with a burning, intolerable anguish, and at the same time with a furious desire to have others share his pain. Night had fallen, deep quiet reigned, and its peace angered the restless lad, who wandered about, his heart full of resentment, with boiling blood. He had left the neighborhood of the cottager-huts, and was walking along the high fence of the tavern-garden, opposite which stood the burgomaster's house. The door of the latter was opened at that moment, and two men came out. Pavel recognized them by their voices as they crossed the street; they were the two oldest councillors.

"He's pretty bad; he can't last much longer. What do you think?"

"Hardly," replied the other.

Who? For God's sake, who can't last much longer? The burgomaster? Pavel suddenly remembered that he had recently met the man, and had not recognized him at first, because he was so changed. The burgomaster is sick and will die, and then Peter will be his own master and can marry Vinska if he wants to.

The peasants approached the tavern. Pavel followed, trying to listen to their talk, but incapable of distinguishing a word; a violent throbbing and roaring in his head drowned the sounds coming from outside. The thought which had made him furious for a moment had lost its terrors before another that was no less painful, but far more appalling, because it made the impossible appear possible, and showed him her whom he hated, whom he loved, before the altar, decked with the bridal wreath, to which she had no longer a right. An insupportable pain came over him, and the raging conflict in his soul gave birth to the wrathful wish: "If only she would have to jump in the well!"

The men slowly walking before him were joined by others, the group stopped for a while in front of the open tavern-door, engaged in drawling, laconic conversation, and then entered the guest-room. Pavel crept after them into the hall; he did not venture any farther. The room was crowded, but there was neither dancing nor music going on to-day; nothing but card-playing, smoking, drinking, quarrelling. Some young fellows were treating their sweethearts to roast meat and wine. At one table sat Arnost, between the maid-servant and the hostler of the postmaster, with a glass of beer, from which they all three drank by turns. The lank cottager's son had improved in appearance of late; he looked well-fed, wore decent clothes, and was even the possessor of a pipe. A year ago he had had the good fortune to lose his good-for-nothing father, and since then he had done well; he supported himself and his mother by the work of his hands, and no longer allowed her to practise thieving. When, not long before, she had once more made an attempt at it, he thrashed her mercilessly, and declared, with an oath, that he would teach the old cat how to forget to steal. With the companions of his youthful exploits he no longer cared to have anything to do, and would not have been willing to touch Pavel, even with a twig; but now and then he showed him some little kindness, in remembrance of the many floggings he had borne in his stead in former years.

When he saw his old playmate looking into the room, he directed the attention of the others to him, and observed that the boy always looked hungry. The little party rose. Arnost paid the score, but kept one of the kreuzers which he got in change for his piece of silver in his hand, and ostentatiously threw it from the middle of the room to Pavel. The latter caught it, held it for a while in his raised, closed hand, but suddenly opened the latter and let the coin fall to the floor.

Arnost bristled up. "Stupid fellow! look for it now, look for the kreuzer."

Pavel, however, put his hands in his pockets: "Look for it yourself; I don't want your money. I've got money of my own!" he replied, pulled out his bag, and swung it to and fro triumphantly, so that the silver florins jingled.

"Money, the vagabond, the beggar had money!" One general cry was heard, and the attention of all present was aroused; many people left their seats and a crowd gathered in the door. The hostler seized Pavel by the collar, shook him, and fumed: "Where did you get it? where? you thief!" and now the boy had reason to rejoice that his jacket was so rotten, and gave way when he planted his foot against the hostler's legs, and freed himself by a vigorous jerk. Leaving a fragment of the old garment in the hands of his assailant, he sprang aside, darted to the door, pushed through the crowd, and ran down the steps into the concealing darkness.

Hardly escaped, however, and with his pursuers at his heels, he called back: "Where did I get it? I stole it!" and then flew on with a jeering laugh, while a troop of young fellows, Arnost at their head, whom he himself had put upon his scent, pursued him cursing and threatening.

He ran up the village street again as far as the alley which, formed by two houses, led to the open space where stood the school. He threw himself into the alley, came into collision with the watchman, who was peaceably going his rounds, swept the old man down so smoothly, that he fell to the ground like an armful of grain beneath a sharp scythe, stumbled, recovered himself again, and ran on, while the watchman, by his cries, attracted Pavel's pursuers once more to the trace which they had lost. The hunted lad had but just time to reach the school-house. He found the door unlocked, entered, closed it, slipped the bolt, and rushed up the stairs to the master's room, while Arnost and his companions were already knocking and shouting at the door.

Habrecht was sitting at the table, which stood in the middle of the room, reading by the light of a small, brightly burning lamp. His elbows rested on the table, and his cheeks on his clenched fists, and those cheeks usually so pale, were flushed, and his eyes, which at other times had so heavy and weary a look, were burning with a strange enthusiasm. As if dragged back to mundane misery from a higher, sadly beautiful world, he looked at the impetuous intruder half angrily, half alarmed, and at the same time, with an involuntary movement of both hands, hid the pages of the book which was lying open before him.

"Master!" panted Pavel, breathlessly, "master, please keep my money for me!" He held out his little bag to him, and reported, in hasty, broken sentences, how he had obtained this wealth, and to what suspicion he had laid himself open with those who were now creating a disturbance below.

"Has the devil been at you again?" Habrecht exclaimed angrily, then running to the window, he opened it, called down as loud as he could, and commanded the howling mob to withdraw. He would take charge of the boy, he would answer for him, and take him to the burgomaster himself the next day. But all this did no good; he had to leave his watch-tower, and go down to the assailants in person, so as at least to prevent them from bursting in his door. And while the old man was parleying in the street, Pavel stood in his room, with his head on fire, his hands, which held fast to the treasure that he had himself endangered, pressed to his breast. "I won't do it again, I certainly won't do anything of the kind again," he thought.

The time which passed seemed endless to him, the noise gradually subsided, all became quiet. Arnost and his companions had begun their retreat, but their excited voices could still be heard for some time. The schoolmaster returned to his room; he was very much flushed, and an unprecedented disorder reigned in his scanty hair, which was flying in all directions.

"They're gone now," said Pavel, and Habrecht muttered: "If only they don't come back."

"They had better!" cried the lad, with a significant glance at the pitcher which stood in a corner by the bed. "If they do, I'll drench them with water."

"You'll not do anything of the kind; you had better think first of all about hiding your money.

Look here!" The master pushed the table against the wall, and raised a piece of that part of floor on which it had stood before. A small hollow space was disclosed, in which the master concealed the book which Pavel had found him reading and the money, and which he then carefully closed again.

The lad had watched his proceedings with greatest attention, and when all was in order again, and the table replaced in its old position, he asked:

"What's the matter with that book? Is it a conjuring book?"

Habrecht flew into a passion. "How foolishly you talk, and how impudently! don't you know what vexes me most of all? Haven't you enough enemies already? do you want me for an enemy, too? Sometimes," he continued, growing more and more vehement, "I have wondered why they are all against you. But I ought not to have wondered; it can't be otherwise, it is your own fault. Whom do you care for? Whom do you respect? Not even me! A 'conjuring-book,' indeed!"

He repeated the word with a new outbreak of indignation, and wrung his hands, which were raised in accusation.

Pavel's face had grown red, and looked quite swollen; his lips trembled as if he were about to burst into tears. With infinite trouble he brought

"FROM WHOM IS THAT LETTER, PAVLICEK?"—*See Page* 69.

out the confession that he had resolved to begin a new life from this day, as his sister Milada had made him promise that morning. At this, the master grew still more excited, and laughed grimly. That was the right thing; the boy had done well—intended wisely, acted senselessly, white resolutions, black deeds. Suddenly, he put his hand to his head, and groaned in deepest pain. "Stupid fellow, poor devil, I know all about it! I could tell you of something just like it. I—but not to you, not yet," he interrupted himself, and waved his index-finger to and fro close to Pavel's nose, as he saw that the latter pricked up his ears with deep interest.

"That is no story for you, not yet; perhaps, at some future time, when you have grown more sensible—and sorer. At present, the wounds are only being struck you, and you don't feel them yet, or at least only superficially, transiently; wait till they have eaten into the flesh—then you will think of me—when you are old. Then you will know that the worst that can befall you, is to suffer in your old age for some youthful folly. Not even a serious one. Thousands have done worse things, and are living in peace with themselves and the world. A bit of presumption—a foolish boast—hardly a falsehood, and yet just enough to light a hell-fire in here." He struck with his fist on his hollow chest, sank back upon his chair, threw his arms across the table, and buried his head in them.

Thus he lay a long time, shaking as if in a fever-chill, and Pavel looked at him compassionately, and did not venture to stir. What was the master doing? was he sobbing, was he weeping so violently that his frail body shook in such a way? Good God, what was it that troubled the man? What was the wrong that he had done in his youth, and which would not let him have any peace in his old age? Pavel was not given to curiosity on the whole, but he would have liked very much to fathom the master's secret. And he would have liked to help him, too; him and himself at the same time. He had already thought of a way; there was such a storm and tumult of thoughts in his head that day, that he fairly seemed to hear them rushing and roaring.

"Master," he began, approaching him and gently touching his shoulder with his finger, "master, listen, I want to tell you something."

Habrecht raised his head, smiled mournfully, and said: "Are you there yet, you foolish boy? go home. Go home!" he repeated sternly, as his first bidding remained without effect.

But Pavel stood firm, like an embodied resolve, looked calmly into the master's eyes, and declared that he should not go home, he must begin something to-day. He had wanted to begin at the convent, but he had not succeeded there, and so he begged the master to let him begin here.

"What?" inquired the old man, "what do you want to begin?"

"My new life," replied Pavel, and was remarkably well-posted as to how he imagined that it ought to be. In the convent he had humbly begged that he might be allowed to stay there; to the master he gave the assurance in a truly comforting manner, that he would remain with him henceforth and take the greatest pains that he should be benefitted by this companionship. How often had the master been vexed at the negligence with which the parish attended to its duty of caring for the field which belonged to the school-house. Now *he* would take charge of the field, and of the garden as well, and soon people would see whether the field was still uncared for, the garden still a wilderness. Not diffusively, but very slowly, Pavel explained how industrious he would be, and that he would ask nothing in return but a shelter and his board. Money he could earn in the fall and winter at the factory, where they paid up to a florin a day. When he should have saved up a hundred florins, he might consider the question of buying enough land to build a house upon it. His sister, too, would continue to save money, and he would go and see her as often as possible—he knew how bad it had been for him that he had not seen her in so long a time. In conclusion, he went back to his comforting tone, and promised to spend all his evenings with the master, "so that you won't be so much alone, and then you can read in your—" he was about to say "conjuring-book," but fortunately swallowed the first three syllables, and only pronounced the last one—"and I will be counting my money meanwhile."

Habrecht had let him talk on, only occasionally saying with a sigh: "Foolish fellow," but Pavel noticed, nevertheless, that the master was not as disinclined as he pretended to be to admit the practicability of the proposed plan.

"That is all very well," he said at last, "at least not as senseless as might be expected from you; but it can't be, nothing can come of it without the consent of the parish."

"That could be obtained, if the master would only stick to it," remarked Pavel, and he maintained his opinion with such firmness, and when he could not think a new answer to new objections, repeated the old one with such stubborn equanimity, that the master at last surrendered, and cried: "Well, then, stay, if there's no way of getting rid of you, you burr!"

Pavel gave a jump for joy, and cried, jubilantly: "I knew it, I knew the master would help me!"

Habrecht reproved him for his clumsiness, his rough ways, scolding all the time, but with an expression of deep inward satisfaction on his poor gray face he made his arrangements for the entertainment and accommodation of his guest. Pavel received a slice of bread and butter, which tasted better than any which he had ever eaten before, and than any which he ever ate in the future, and was shown into a small room adjoining that of the master. The latter spread a coarse rug on the floor: "There, lie down, and go right to sleep," he said, covered the boy with an old threadbare cloak and left the room, closing the door behind him. Pavel remained in the dark, and had the best intention to obey the master's last order, but he did not succeed, his soul was too full of joy. So the new life had commenced! so he was no longer lying shivering, huddled up, in the hall of the herdsman's hut, into which the wind, icy cold and keen as a knife, penetrated through the wide chinks in the door, he lay under a cloak of real cloth, in a room which let in no air from the outside, and where there was a delicious smell of all sorts of good things, of venerable old clothes, of moth-destroying herbs, of boots, of sour milk. How comfortable he felt, and how he enjoyed in advance the pleasure that Milada would take in his happiness! While thinking of his sister, he closed his eyes, and when he opened them again, the slender crescent of the new moon was shining in at the window. He greeted it, and said to it: "You're beginning, too; we're both beginning." At the same time, in spite of everything new that surrounded him, in spite of the new feelings that were fermenting and sprouting within him, there came over him, for the first time in many, many years, a home-feeling. Suddenly the memory of the nights rose up before him which, long ago, he had spent with his parents under the roofs of the brick-sheds among strangers and yet at home, because they had carried their whole domestic misery with them. And now he had a home again, and a better one than before; he had no longer his father to fear, and his mother was far away. His mother, indeed, would come back, and then—. He shivered, he wrapped the cloak closer around him, and said a short, vigorous prayer, the substance of which was:

"Dear Lord God, Thou seest that I have taken the right way; now, dear Lord God, look out that I don't have to leave it again!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE BURGOMASTER'S DEATH.

When the master went to see the burgomaster, the next day, the latter was lying on his bed, tortured by pain. In his wretched state he took not the slightest interest in the weal or woe of his fellow-men. As often as the schoolmaster began to speak about Pavel, the patient invariably reverted to himself, his sufferings, and his physician, who, as he said, kept coming in every few minutes, stole the money from his pocket, and did him no good. His maid-servant was far better off than he. Yes, indeed! a few weeks ago she was so sick and weak that she could hardly stand on her legs, and now she was perfectly well. And why? Because, from the beginning, she would have nothing to do with the doctor, because, without much ado, she had sent to the herdsman's wife for a remedy. That had helped her; in an hour she was well!

The master said: "Hm, hm!" and once more stated Pavel's case, upon which the sick man again told him the story of the remarkable cure of his servant girl.

" And what is your decision about young Holub?" asked the schoolmaster, and finally was told to apply to the councilors.

So he made the rounds of the councilors. One after the other listened to him patiently and attentively, and each one said :

" You must consult the burgomaster first about that."

" The burgomaster sent me to you."

" Well, then, you must go to the other two councilors."

Not one of them could be induced by calm persuasion to make an independent decision, or even express an opinion, and Habrecht took care not to show too much zeal, so as not to arouse in the suspicious village-fathers a mistrust that he had some selfish motive in the matter.

At last he went to the castle, in order to plead his protege's cause there, but he met with an ungracious reception. The letter from the convent had had the desired effect. The Baroness reproached herself bitterly for having advocated a meeting between the brother and sister, was very angry at Pavel, did not wish to hear him mentioned, and advised the schoolmaster once for all to leave the young scapegrace to his fate.

The week passed. Virgil went to the schoolhouse every day to fetch Pavel, but the boy was either not to be found, or he resisted openly. At last the herdsman and his wife went to the burgomaster and requested him to use his authority and compel the boy to come back to them. The sick man promised everything that they asked, gave the quack-doctress a questioning, almost imploring look after every painfully uttered sentence, and moaned, pointing to his aching right side: "There it is; there's the devil!"

"Good God! good God!" said the woman. "The right side, yes, the right side, that's where it hurts, that's the liver."

"The liver? Well, yes, you at least say something, you do. You say it's the liver, but the doctor don't say liver and don't say anything."

"Don't say anything, and don't know anything," said the woman, with an expression of superiority and contempt.

"He does not even know of anything that will soothe the pain; he knows nothing whatever."

Virgilova raised her folded hands to her lips and breathed on the tips of her fingers. "Good heavens! and when one thinks how easy it would be to help the Herr Burgomaster!"

The sick man writhed upon his bed. "Do you think so? Then help me!"

"If I only dared," she replied, with a quick, wary glance. "If I only dared send something—your Honor would be well in a fortnight."

"Send me something then, send it! But—hold your tongue about it. You understand?" He interrupted himself to listen anxiously to footsteps and voices that were approaching, and then continued, in a low tone: "When it is dark, the girl will come and get it."

"I'll send the boy, that will be better, and then your Honor can scold him, and say to him: 'You'll go back to where you belong.' The girl can watch for him by the stable-door."

The burgomaster waved his hand vehemently: "At nine. Go now, go!"

Virgil and his wife obeyed quickly, but had only reached the door when they met Peter and the doctor. The latter asked his unauthorized colleague harshly what business she had here? Peter dismissed the old couple no less suspiciously and far more roughly.

They went home in silence.

When they had reached the cabin, the woman went at once to the chest, searched out a dirty box, wrapped in rags, and took from it two small bottles. One of them bore a label of the drug-store in the city, and was marked "Spirits of Chamomile." The contents of the second were of a yellow-gray color, and had a thick, whitish sediment. Examining it attentively, the woman held the bottle up to the light, and began to turn it slowly in her fingers.

Virgil had seated himself on the bench. "What are you doing?" he asked suddenly. "What do you want to help him for? Leave him alone."

"Nobody can help him," answered his wife; "he's got to die."

"Got to die? Then what do you want? Don't interfere."

She shugged her shoulders: "He may hold out nine months or a year."

"Or a year?" repeated Virgil in alarm, and, after reflecting a few moments he suddenly cried, wrathfully: "Did you notice how his son spoke to us?"

"Only because he was afraid of his father," replied the woman. "He'd like to beat us for very fear. And he'll beat *her*, too, *then!*" She laid particular stress upon this word, and winked her pale, cat-like eyes. "Then, when his love will have gone up in smoke—and it does that soon, with all the boys, bad fellows that they are. 'Begone!' he'll say then, 'I don't want to have anything more to do with you !' And the girl knows that it will be like that, and if it is so, she'll jump in the well."

Virgil uttered a hoarse sound, and crossed himself three times in succession : "Talk! foolish girl's talk !"

"With our girl it isn't only talk," answered the woman, in a tone of the deepest conviction. "She'll do it."

"No she won't."

"Wait till she gets a chance."

"Let her, then. She need n't put herself out for me, the hussy."

"It's the best she can do. There'll only be one poor girl less in the world. I should have been glad, though, if the old man had died sooner, now, while Peter would take her if he could do as he liked—and if she only had him! if!"—the woman burst out laughing—"then it would be *he*, who would get the drubbing."

Virgil at first joined in his wife's noisy hilarity, but he soon ceased laughing, drew the corners of his mouth down hypocritically, and said, with a deep sigh : "Let us hope that God may soon release the poor burgomaster from his sufferings !"

"Perhaps he will," replied the woman, in a harsher tone ; "and now go and fetch the boy."

"He won't come."

"Say that the Herr Burgomaster has ordered it."

"He won't come for that either."

"Tell him Vinska has sent for him."

The herdsman rose, and crept to the door. There he stopped, turned round and said: "Look here—you needn't exactly help him, but you're not to give him anything wrong, either."

She winked at him mockingly: "We'll see," she answered. Around her thin lips, which were tightly stretched over her projecting, well-preserved teeth, there hovered a greenish shadow.

Her husband felt a cold chill running down his back; he limped away slowly.

Two full hours Pavel kept them waiting. It was almost night when he finally reached the hut, knocked at the door, and asked for Vinska. He could not be prevailed upon to enter.

The herdsman, who had accompanied him, leaned against the wall and did not stir. Silence reigned in the cottager's lodging, interrupted only by the vigorous snoring of Arnost, whose bed stood near the window.

Virgilova appeared on the threshold. "Vinska has gone to bed," she said; "you can't see her now. What made you come so late? And you've got to go to the burgomaster, besides."

"I?"

"You're to ask him yourself to let you stay with the master, and—" she lowered her voice to a hardly audible whisper,—"you're to take him some medicine."

"Aha!" Pavel understood at once what the real question was. He had often enough been the old woman's secret messenger to sick persons, and shared with the whole village the belief in her skill and in the efficacy of her remedies. He therefore stretched out his hand and said: "Give it to me."

She gave him the bottle with the harmless contents and impressed upon his mind very particularly the precautionary measures to be observed in emptying it "in three doses. Go through the garden," she concluded, when the lad became impatient, and was only half listening to her. "Keep away from the street, so that the watchman won't see you. The girl knows that you're coming, and will open the door for you."

With a few bounds Pavel was at the top of the bank, for a moment his dark shadow was outlined against the lead-colored horizon, then he disappeared.

Virgilova stepped up to her husband, took him by the arm, and drew him aside a few steps. "Now you'll run after the boy and tell him: 'My wife forgot something ; he must drink *this* first, and send back the bottle at once, so that she can pound it in a mortar, and strew the powder on seven mole-hills, else it would do no good. That is what you are to say, and this is what you are to give him."

She pressed a small cold object into his hand, the touch of which made him shudder.

"For God's sake, is there something wrong in it?"

"It's something for his pains ; it'll stop them."

"Like the rats," he said, and added, suddenly growing angry: "Why didn't you give it to the boy at once? why have I got to take it?

She chuckled. "So that you can't say, if the matter is found out: 'I don't know anything about it'; so that you can't leave me in the lurch, if things go wrong; that's the reason, you rogue. And now go."

He turned away from her. "I won't go," he said.

"Let him suffer, then! No one knows what he'll have to suffer yet! His own son couldn't do anything better for him than release him. He'll say to his son yet: 'Kill me, or I'll curse you!' Run, run! Won't you go even now? Then let him suffer like a bitten dog, so that he'll have time to drive Vinska into the well, and to curse and swear away his son's happiness and his own salvation."

She spoke in a low tone, with vehement and terrible eloquence, and Virgil winced beneath the torrent of her words as if pricked by a thousand needles. "It is a labor of love, a work of mercy to release him; a man that *is* a man would do it for God's sake!"

He panted; it was horrible to him to see that his wife's eyes gleamed in the darkness with a strange, pale, whitish light.

"For God's sake? Well, then, for God's sake I'll do it," he repeated, turned away, and went his way.

The alley towards which he hastened was formed by the back-walls of several barns, and the fence of the burgomaster's garden. Having reached the corner of the latter, Virgil stopped. Behind the fence there was a rustling, a whisper fell upon the old man's ear, tender love-whispers, sighs, words of endearment, kisses, leave-taking for one night as if it were for eternity. "It's those two," thought Virgil. "It's that hussy, that is kissing and hugging there,—that hussy, for whom I must go and commit murder. Must I? I was at confession yesterday, and I'm going again next month, but I couldn't confess *that*, and there's no absolution for that—nothing but hell!" On the preceding Sunday the curate had preached about hell, and depicted its torments in detail.

The herdsman still hastened on, his teeth chattered, he wheezed loudly at every breath. Wailing and gnashing of teeth, that is hell, he carries it within him. But it is outside of him, too, the darkness is hell, and what is that, walking there in front of him, that broad black streak, blacker than the darkness? Why, it is Pavel!" flashes through the chaotic confusion of his ideas. "Call him, why don't you call him?" he admonishes himself. "What for? why to give him—" he did not finish the thought. It seemed to him as if his head was growing and getting as big as a ten-pail tub, and as if his feet were getting as weak and thin as willow-twigs; and are these weak feet to carry his monstrous head, and the hell which is in his bosom? That will never do; never in the world. But what is happening now? Holy mercy! The black streak is changing its shape, and it is not Pavel, but the devil himself after whom Virgil is walking; the devil, who does not even look round at him, so sure is he of his following after him. A dizziness comes over the herdsman, and his knees give way under him. "No!" he gasps, "no, I will not do it! God in heaven, Blessed Trinity, pardon my sins!" And the name of the Highest and the Holiest breaks the spell and it is Pavel who now bends over the old man and asks:

"What are you doing here?"

"I, I?" sobbed Virgil, clinging to him with both hands. "I, nothing. I was to have carried some poison, but I'll not carry it. I'll bury it in the ground. Watch me, stay here and watch me."

"Let me go, you're drunk again," said the boy, then extricated himself from Virgil's tight clasp, and climbed over the fence into the garden.

The next morning Pavel awoke from a deep sleep. The door of the little room which the master had assigned to him had been thrown open; in the dim light of the dawning autumn-day the schoolmaster stood before him, crying:

"Get up! hurry, you have got to toll the passing bell."

"For whom?" asked Pavel, stretching his limbs, heavy with sleep.

"For the burgomaster—"

The boy sprang up as if shot.

"He is dead. I'm going there; do you look to the tolling," said Habrecht, and hastened away.

Pavel's first sensation was alarm and astonishment. The burgomaster, to whom he had only yesterday taken the remedy which was to make him well,—not recovered! dead—not recovered! The medicine had not helped him! It had not been God's will, perhaps because the good God meant well by Pavel. Perhaps he allowed the burgomaster to die, so that he could not force Pavel to stay at Virgil's any longer.

The boy rushed out of the house and across the yard, up the stairs to the bell tower, and tolled, tolled devoutly, fervently, with solemn deliberation. And at the same time he prayed silently and ardently for the welfare of the dead man's soul.

When he descended from the tower, he met the curate, who, returning from the house of death, the covered chalice in his hands, was about to enter the church. Pavel fell on his knees before the Sacred Viaticum, and the priest, in passing, cast upon him a look so full of condemnation and repudiation, that he started in alarm, smote his breast, and asked himself: "Is he angry at me, because he possibly thinks, too, that the burgomaster had to die on my account?"

He went back to the school-house and to his room, and had hardly reached the latter, when Vinska rushed in, violently agitated, quite beside herself.

She had thrown on her clothes hastily, the kerchief had fallen back from her disheveled hair, her face was deathly pale, and with gestures of the wildest despair, she threw herself at Pavel's feet.

"Have pity!" she cried, "you are better than any of us. Dear Pavel, because you are so good, have pity on us! We have always treated you badly, but have pity nevertheless, have pity on my old father, my old mother, have pity on me!"

She pressed her face against his knees, which she had embraced, and looked up to him imploringly. He had turned paler than she, a feeling of rapture mingled with fear thrilled through him. "What do you want?" he asked.

"Pavel," she replied, pressing closer against him. "The dead man had the bottle that you brought him last night in his hand when they found him, and people say—and Peter says, too, that there was poison in it."

"Poison?" He suddenly recollected the nocturnal scene with Virgil. "Yes, your father spoke of poison. You nest of vipers! You meant to poison the burgomaster!"

"As true as God lives," protested Vinska, "I knew nothing about it, and as true as God lives, too, no harm has been done. You may believe me, the burgomaster died of his sickness, only sooner than the doctor thought he would, and the medicine that you took to him was a good medicine. They 'll find that out in court, for the matter is to be taken before the court; Peter wishes it."

Panting, in indescribable excitement, she uttered these words, and her fixed gaze held his eye enchained.

"If that is so," replied Pavel, "what are you afraid of?"

"What? Don't you know how people are? If mother is once taken to court, and is acquitted ten times, it will be said, nevertheless: 'An acquittal is no proof of innocence.' Mother must not go to court, Pavel, Pavel!"

She repeated his name in every key of anguish, her delicate body wound itself about him like a serpent, and he, with resisting soul, full of suspicion and resentment, devoured her with his eyes.

"I can't help you," he muttered.

"Yes, you can, if you're only willing; you need only say—oh, say it, dear, dear, good Pavel!"

"What? what shall I say?"

"That nobody sent you," she stammered, timidly; "that you went to him of your own accord."

"How should I go to him of my own accord? How should I take him any medicine of my brewing? *I* don't know anything about such things!"

"Oh, my dear, dearest Pavel, a herdsman always knows something of the kind. You have often boiled herbs for the goats and the sheep, and so you thought that what was good for them, would be good for a sick man, too; that's what you can say, Pavlicek, when they ask you." She kissed him on his burning lips, and he resisted no longer. "Say that," she went on, "and tell them everything, just as it happened, how you made your way into his room, and what he said when he saw you."

"He didn't say anything."

"Didn't say anything?"

"No, he only stared dreadfully."

"And you?"

"I begged him to let me stay with the master."

"And then? Go on, Pavlicek, go on."

"Then he shook his head; 'No, no,' and stared still worse at the medicine, and signed to me to give him some of it."

"And you gave him some?"

"Yes."

"And no one else was there?"

"No one."

"And the girl? Was she outside the door?"

"She was outside the door."

"And what did she say?"

"'God grant that the medicine may help him.'"

"And you?"

"I said: 'God grant it.'"

"And when you got out into the garden, was there nobody there?"

"Yes; Peter," said Pavel, decidedly. "He heard me, and called after me."

"That is good, all very good; you must tell them all that," whispered Vinska, embracing him as if she would suffocate him, "and no harm will come to you; they are very clever at court, and can tell whether a medicine is poisonous or not. Nothing will happen to you, and you will have helped us; so I beseech you, have pity, have pity on us!"

She looked at him as one struggling with death looks at the deliverer from whom he expects his whole salvation, and a blissful feeling of power swelled the bosom of the despised boy.

"What will I get if I do it?" he cried triumphantly, grasping both her arms. "Will you give up Peter then, and take me?"

A wild despair flashed across her features; overcome by anger, she forgot all policy. "Stupid boy, that is not what I meant!"

She almost screamed these words, and tried to free herself from his grasp.

He answered, mockingly: "Not? then why did you kiss me so often, and call me dearest? Shall I go to court instead of your mother, so that Peter can marry you? Is that what you want?"

"That is what I want!" she said, gloomily, "that is what I must have. Stupid boy!" She retreated a step and lifted her clasped hands. "I must go to the burgomaster's house as his wife, or I must jump into the well."

"You must?—must?—must?" He had comprehended, and groaned in anguish and horror: "Vile creature!"

She closed her eyes, tears ran down her cheeks. "I thought you loved me and would help me," she said, in a gentle voice, "but you will not do it!"

She said no more; he was breathless from wrath and grief. For a while they stood opposite to each other without speaking. He, as if on the point of rushing at her to strangle her; she, prepared for the worst and resigned to it.

"Vinska," he said at last, and at his tone, defiant though it was, she hoped again.

"What is it—dear, good Pavel?"

"Vile creature!" he repeated, through his closed teeth.

She was about to throw herself on her knees before him again, but he took her in his arms, carried her to the door, and thrust her out. Once more she turned to him, annihilated, contrite:

"What will you say in court?"

"I'll see what I'll say," he replied. "Go!"

She obeyed.

CHAPTER X.

PAVEL ACCUSED.

In the house of the burgomaster all was confusion and alarm. For the tenth time Peter was telling the curious villagers, who invaded the chamber of death, how he had spoken to his father before midnight, and had then gone to bed in the next room, and how, a few hours later, he had been wakened by moans. How he had jumped out of bed, rushed to his father, and found him breathing his last, and had sent the man-servant for the priest and the girl for the doctor, and how both of them had come too late, and how the doctor, when he took the dead man's hand, found it tightly clenched, and had to open it by force, so as to take from it a little half-emptied bottle, which the fingers, stiffened in death, still held fast.

The listeners expressed their sympathy by sighs and lamentation.

Peter continued:

"The curate looked at it: 'What's this?' he asked, and the doctor looked at it too, and said nothing—you know that's his way—'Lord God in heaven,' cried the curate, 'have his sufferings been too much for him? Has he died in mortal sin?' 'He died of a hemorrhage,' said the doctor, and then he held the bottle to his nose, 'and this is spirits of chamomile,' says he."

"Who believes that?" an old woman interrupted Peter, and he gave a sob.

"'Who believes it?' that's what I said! My father was poisoned! I saw a fellow sneaking out of the garden last night, and 'I think I know him,' I said, and I went after the girl, and gave her a box on the ear, and asked: 'Who was in my father's room last night?' 'Pável,' she blubbered, and fell on her knees; 'Your father gave orders that he should be let in. Kill me if you like, but as true as God lives, your father ordered me to let him in; I am saying what's true, and that is all I know.'"

At this part of his story Peter regularly broke out into violent weeping. He would throw himself upon his father's corpse, and the hard, rough fellow would whimper like a child. "My mother died long ago, and now I have no father left; I am an orphan, and left all alone now!"

Among those assembled, who were listening with deep interest to the outbreaks of his sincere grief, accusing voices against Pavel were heard. That bad boy was sure to have been concerned in the burgomaster's death. Worthless fellow that he was, who doubtless would rather be idle than work, he found the place at the herdsman's too hard; he wanted to leave, but couldn't go without the burgomaster's permission, and because he wouldn't give it, often as the boy asked for it, the good-for-nothing had now revenged himself, and made away with the burgomaster.

The legend was soon complete, circulated rapidly in the village, and stirred the people up to unwonted energy. The local authorities, deprived of their head, sent a messenger to the district court to fetch a gendarme, for all cases, while a few hot-spurs ran to the school-house, in order—likewise for all cases—to give the poisoner a good thrashing. They found the door locked, however. The master, as soon as the report so threatening to Pavel had reached him, had subjected the lad to an examination, then locked him into the school-room, and gone to the doctor's. At the house of the latter he found the curate, Peter, Anton the blacksmith and several peasants already assembled.

The curate sat in the large black easy-chair, in one corner of the window-recess; in the other, with his hands on his back, stood the doctor. Opposite these two, the peasants formed a regular semi-circle.

"Ah, here comes the Herr Schoolmaster," said the curate, in his low, somewhat hoarse voice.

"You probably know what we are conferring about," remarked the doctor, around whose bluish lips there hovered a hardly perceptible smile.

Peter cried: "Pavel has poisoned my father."

"That remains to be proved," muttered Anton.

"And has got to be tried," continued Peter, and Anton again observed:

"That remains to be seen," which Peter trumped by saying:

"I insist upon it; he must be tried."

"For the present," said Habrecht, "I have locked him into the school-room."

The curate started. "So you also think—" he stopped suddenly, almost in alarm, like one who has said something which he did not intend to say, and who is much annoyed thereat.

Habrecht noticed it, and maliciously laid stress upon the most significant word in the whole too hastily spoken sentence. "Also?" he repeated, emphatically; "that is, like your Reverence?"

A slight flush appeared upon the sunken cheeks of the priest.

"I was thinking of the *vox populi*," he said.

" Ah, indeed !—the distorted *vox Dei*."

At that moment the door opened ; a tall man, bent with age, with yellow-gray hair and brick-red face, entered the room : he was one of the older peasants, named Barosch. He approached the curate, kissed his hand, and informed him that the gendarme would arrive soon.

" What is the gendarme to do ?" asked Habrecht, angrily, and Barosch humbly fixed upon the master his staring eyes—which were bloodshot with drink, and always seemed to express astonishment, and to be asking pardon,—while he answered :

" Take the boy to the district court."

" What is the boy to do at the district court ?"

" Confess."

" What ?"

" That he took something to the burgomaster."

" He has confessed that already."

" Indeed ?" said the curate, " has he confessed that to you ?"

" He would confess it to you, too."

" I should like to be sure of that, Herr Schoolmaster. Will you have the kindness to send for him ?"

" I'll go for him," shouted Peter, and was about to hasten away ; but Anton held him back :

"Not you, you don't know what you are about. I'll go, master."

But Habrecht rejected his offer with thanks, left the room, and returned after a while accompanied by his protege.

It was only with difficulty that Peter could be restrained from falling upon the latter, but he threatened him, and cried, as loudly as the choking wrath which had befallen him at the sight of Pavel would permit: "Look at the dog! Can't any one see plainly what a cur the dog is?"

And, indeed, the condition in which the lad appeared before the highest authorities of his village was not calculated to awaken a prejudice in his favor. His head seemed to be on fire, there was an expression of sullen, shrinking misery in his burning face, and a terrible, unquenchable hatred flashed from the glances which, from under his half-closed lids, he cast upon his chief accuser, upon Peter.

Habrecht laid his hand upon Pavel's shoulder, and pushed him before him to the window, placing him between the curate and the doctor.

The curate looked at the boy in silence awhile, cleared his throat, and asked, in a calm and business-like manner: "Is it true that you stole into the burgomaster's house last night and brought him something?"

Pavel nodded, and a whisper of triumphant indignation ran through the circle of the listening peasants.

"What was it that you brought him?"

"It was a good medicine."

"Where did you get the good medicine?" asked the master, in his turn.

Pavel remained silent, and Habrecht continued:

"Did not somebody send you to the burgomaster with that good medicine?"

The boy started, and said, hastily:

"No; I took it to him of my own accord."

"How do you happen to know anything about good medicines all at once?" inquired the doctor, joining in the examination; and Pavel replied:

"A herdsman always knows something of the kind."

"He lies," exclaimed the master; "he either does not wish to speak the truth, or has been forbidden to do so."

"And what do you think is the truth?" asked the curate, whose composure contrasted favorably with Habrecht's nervous restlessness.

"The truth is, in my opinion, that the boy was sent to the sick burgomaster, and that by the quack-doctress, the herdsman's wife."

Pavel fairly shouted:

"She didn't send me! I went of my own accord."

And Peter repeated wrathfully:

"Of his own accord! he admits it, but the master does not. The master wants to mix innocent people up with the affair. May God forgive the master for that! The boy has n't had anything to do with the people whom the master wants to mix up with it for a long time; the boy has been staying with the master in the school-house for weeks."

"I only wonder," said the doctor to him, "that your father should have been willing to take the remedy which the boy brought him of his own accord; unless—he had expressly ordered it from the boy, which hardly seems probable to me."

"Tell me exactly how it all happened," said the curate, turning to Pavel. "So you stole into the burgomaster's room last night?"

"Yes."

"And what did you say?"

"Good evening, Herr Burgomaster."

"And what did he say?"

"Nothing."

"And what did he do?"

"He signed to me to give him the medicine."

"So he knew that you were going to bring him some medicine?"

Pavel did not answer; he had bent his head forward, and was listening to a noise of footsteps and voices which were approaching the door. The latter opened once more, and Kohautek, the gendarme, called also the "hot gendarme," appeared on the threshold, followed by the councilors.

The temperature of the room, already very high, suddenly rose in such a degree that it seemed as if a heated stove had been brought in; and all this heat appeared to radiate from Kohautek, who was burning with professional zeal. But it was only from his eyes that the inward flames flashed, and whatever warmth he might feel was betrayed only by the small drops of perspiration which stood upon his nose. His face was of a fine, clear olive and never became flushed.

He at once entered upon the duties of his office, and began a preliminary examination. The whole man was one single threat when he addressed the accused, and yet the latter felt calmer and more secure since his arrival; he fancied that he was in favor with Kohautek, since he had, on one occasion, been suspected by him of stealing chickens and subsequently found innocent. The gendarme asked Pavel almost the same questions which had been put to him before, received the same answers, and finally reached the dark point in the matter, the source of the *corpus delicti*, the little bottle. With regard to this *corpus*, this bottle, the boy *must* make a statement, he must do it! Kohautek was confident of prevailing upon him to do so at once, questioned him, encouraged him, warned him against the danger to which he exposed himself by his obstinate silence, all in vain. The lad winked at him almost familiarly, and remained deaf to his admonitions as well as to those of the curate and the earnest entreaties of Habrecht, and insensible to the abuses of Peter and his associates.

Finally, he grew entirely dumb, and the peasants saw in this the surest proof of his consciousness of guilt. Peter spat on the floor before him:

"He shall be tried!" he said again. "He poisoned my father."

"With spirits of chamomile," said the doctor, taking the bottle from his pocket and holding it to the nose of the blacksmith Anton, the only one of the party who had his wits about him.

Anton smelt of it, shrugged his shoulders, and said:

"Yes, indeed—it smells of chamomile,—but—"

"Well,—but?"

"No one knows what it *is*."

The master, who was quivering all over, and who was constantly muttering to himself: "Control yourself; Habrecht, keep your nerves under," replied to this: "What do you think, my men, if this were poison, would I drink of it? See, I am going to drink some!" He asked the doctor for the bottle and took a swallow from it. "You see now, I have drank of it and am perfectly well, and expect to feel quite as well to-morrow."

The peasants were somewhat taken aback, looked at the schoolmaster askance, drew nearer to each other, and whispered together.

"What do you think? What are you saying to each other?"

Barosch sighed, shook his head, twisted his broad, grinning mouth, and finally blurted out:

"Well, that is nothing wonderful—there's no poison in the bottle now."

"Why not? It's the same bottle, and what was in it before, is in it now; that is to say, a little less."

"Well, the poison was gone, the burgomaster got that when he drank from the bottle. The poison is the lightest, and floats on the surface."

"Floats on the surface!" shouted Peter, and the schoolmaster was beside himself with wrath and indignation.

"Do you hear? do you hear that?" he cried, addressing the curate. The latter maintained his passive expression and his composure, and replied to

Habrecht's appeal merely by a gesture of regret. The gendarme stood immovable and radiated heat, with a stern look on his face; the doctor, on the other hand, lost patience. He, of whom it was said that he was as chary of his words as if each one of them cost him a florin, broke out into a speech: "O never-to-be-conquered and eternally triumphant stupidity! 'The poison is the lightest and floats on the surface!' There we have it, now we know it, let us stick to it; no power on earth would convince us of the contrary, at any rate. And if God himself were to come down from heaven and take the trouble to prove and disprove, he would have made the journey in vain!"

The peasants heard his accusation without knowing exactly what to make of it; but Pavel listened to it with increased delight. The doctor was amazed at the comprehension which shone, triumphant and joyful from the boy's eyes, as they were fixed upon him. The latter, for the first time in his life, held his head proudly erect, imbibing every word spoken by the doctor, as it were, like a delicious draught, and when the last one had been uttered, he burst into a wild, defiant laugh.

At this the general indignation broke out against him. For a short time Kohautek could do nothing to protect him; in spite of his desperate resistance

Pavel was thrown to the ground, maltreated, trampled on. The gendarme was obliged to exert his whole authority, and Anton, who placed himself beside him, the whole strength of his fists, to rescue the lad from the outbursts of the senseless fury of his self-appointed judges. After a short, hasty consultation with the curate, the schoolmaster and the doctor, Kohautek resolved to take Pavel with him to the district court.

"I do not do it because I think him guilty," he cried; "I do it because you are beasts, from whom I want to protect him. Let some one get a wagon."

"I," shouted Peter, "I'll drive him over!" and with one bound he was out of the room.

The curate cast a glance out of the window. In front of the house the villagers had formed groups, and were listening to the sounds which came from inside, repeating in the greatest excitement occasional words which it had been possible for them to distinguish.

The commotion reached its highest point when Peter arrived with his light wagon and the gendarme, with Pavel and the schoolmaster, who would not desert the lad on his dreary expedition, appeared in the door of the doctor's house. Habrecht climbed to the front seat, beside Peter, the gendarme with the delinquent occupied the back seat. Curses, as well as threatening looks and gestures, were sent after the wagon as it rolled away. Peter drove through the village so slowly that all the children of the streets had time to join and follow the vehicle. They did so amid shouts and jeers.

"There he goes," cried a voice from the troop; "there he goes," was repeated in chorus.

"Where are you going?" shouted a little deformed imp, and a pretty cottager's child, a small, blue-eyed girl, one of the merriest of the bold band at whose head Pavel used to go to the forest to steal wood, looked up at him laughingly, and said: "Are you going to your father or to your mother?"

This watchword, once given out, resounded through the air in countless repetitions; the youthful persecutors grew wilder and wilder, and at last Peter, at the command of the gendarme, struck with his whip at the band, intoxicated as they were with malice and delight in tormenting. They seemed to disperse, but only took a shorter route, and posted themselves behind a statue of St. John, which stood among trees at the end of the village. When the wagon reached the place, it was received with loud halloos and a shower of clods and stones. Kohautek swore, Peter whipped up the horses, Habrecht turned up the collar of his coat, Pavel sat motionless. It was only when the vehicle was out of range of even its most persevering pursuers, that he stooped and calmly threw out the stones which had fallen into the wagon; all but the last, the smallest. This he looked at attentively, and then put it in his pocket.

"What are you going to do with that stone?" asked the gendarme.

"When I build me a house—and I mean to build one," was the answer, "I shall put that stone under the threshold of the door, so that I can remember, whenever I go in and out, how people have treated me."

An hour later the party had reached their destination. The district-judge ordered Pavel to be brought before him, and seemed more inclined to believe in his guilt than in his innocence, "for," he was in the habit of remarking, "as far as I am concerned, my opinion of people in general is not merely that they are bad, but that they are unutterably vile."

Justice took its course. An autopsy of the burgomaster's corpse was appointed. In the absence of the official chemist, his substitute, a very self-confident young man, conducted the necessary analysis in a very elegant manner, and roundly confirmed the presence of poison in the stomach and the intestines of the deceased. The result of this was a succession of evil days for Pavel, but he remained firm, and behaved before the official judge exactly as he had done at the examination at home in the village. His sufferings came to an end with the return of the chemist employed by the court, who subjected the work of his green rival to an examination, demonstrated its inaccuracy, and in concert with the official surgeon, proved to the district-physician incontrovertibly that the burgomaster did not die of poison, but of his ailment.

Almost immediately after, Pavel was acquitted and discharged. Peter, his chief accuser, was condemned to pay the costs.

On the last Sunday which Pavel spent in jail, Habrecht obtained permission to visit him. The master was deeply moved at their meeting.

"Two months in jail!" he cried, "this is what you have come to, you, your own enemy. Pavel, Pavel, people have done you much harm, but not one of them as much as you have done yourself!"

He asked him what he had thought about during his long, lonely days and nights.

"Nothing much; at night I sleep, and in the daytime I work; they have lent me some tools," replied Pavel, and took out from under his bed the model of a house—his future dwelling-house,—which he had represented very accurately in miniature, with windows, doors, and a thatched roof. It was a remarkable contrast, the boy with the coarse hands, and this delicate piece of work. He had made it for his sister Milada, and begged Habrecht to take it with him and send it to her; asking him, at the same time, to write to her; he wanted his sister to know that he was innocent. Habrecht promised to do so, but did not mention that he had already addressed two voluminous letters to the Superior, in which the state of affairs was explained conscientiously and with honest diffuseness, and Pavel appeared as pure as an Easter-lamb made of sugar. Both missives were, in point of form and contents, patterns of that courteousness which is ever sufficient unto itself, because it springs from an unappeasable longing of the heart. Unfortunately, however, they had not incited their recipient to imitation; Habrecht's letters had remained unanswered.

It was towards the end of January, the air was mild, the snow was beginning to melt, narrow brown brooks flowed down the slopes. The sun peeped dejectedly through the whitish clouds, the leafless trees along the road threw pale shadows on the muddy footpath, on the margin of which Pavel was walking towards the village.

During his detention he had often thought that if he could only be free, in the open air, if he could only move about once more, all would be well. Now he was free, he was going home, and all was not well. Just as desolate, as bare, as joyless as the landscape in its wintry poverty, his future lay before him.

In the village he went first of all to the herdsman's hut. The hearth in the hall had been cleared. Vinska was kneeling before it and stirring the fire, which burned brightly and briskly. Silently, without looking at her, Pavel walked past her, straight into the room. Virgil and his wife screamed when he appeared; the old woman covered her face with her apron, the herdsman held up a rosary before him, as one who would exorcise the devil, trembling all over the while; but Pavel folded his arms and said:

"Rascals, both of you! I 've come back, and I 've got a paper in my pocket that shows that I 've been acquitted by the court. Now I advise you to let me stay at the schoolmaster's and leave me alone, else you 'll be sorry for it. My tongue has n't grown to the roof of my mouth. That's all I had to say to you," he concluded, and then turned away and left the house.

They looked after him in bewilderment. How he had changed in those two months. He had gone away a boy, he had come back a youth; he had grown taller, and at the same time no slimmer.

CHAPTER XI.

PAVEL BUYS LAND.

Outside the village, at the foot of a slope which, years ago, was covered by the parish-forest, long since cleared, there was a deserted sand-pit. Since it had been emptied of its contents to the last grain, it belonged to the dead capitals of the parish property, and no one ever thought of putting the barren piece of ground to any use; for no one who would have begun to plough and to sow there, would ever live to see the harvest. Once only the steward of the Baroness, whose poorest fields adjoined the sand-pit, offered thirty florins for the bit of land, which was luxuriantly overgrown with weeds, but withdrew from the bargain again when it was about to be closed. Since that time no other purchaser had come forward. Great astonishment prevailed, therefore, when, at last, a new buyer presented himself, who was no other than Pavel Holub.

A year had passed since he had been discharged from prison, and day after day, winter and summer, he had started out early in the morning and had returned home only as night was falling. Nothing could induce him to interrupt the uniformity of his mode of life, or to draw from him any expression of interest in the occurrences of the outer world. Of the marriage of Peter and Vinska, which was celebrated very quietly, and gave even the most taciturn of the villagers much occasion for talk, he said not a word. On that day, as on every other, he went to Zbaro, where he always found work in the saw-mill, in the sugar refinery, or in the woods. He earned a good deal, and at the end of the week could place his wages undiminished in the savings-bank under the floor in Habrecht's room, as the latter supplied him with food and clothes. He watched the increase of his treasure with delight, and, altogether, would have been quite contented—on two conditions. The first was a meeting with his sister, the second, deliverance from the mockery of the village children. But neither was fulfilled. Whenever he showed himself at the convent door, he was turned away relentlessly, and no matter how early he started for Zbaro, there were always some boys and girls who had risen earlier still, in order to watch for him, and call out to him through a crack in the door, or from behind a hedge:

"Poisoner! You 're nothing but a poisoner, after all!"

For a long time Pavel was silent, but at last, full of bitterness, he gave vent to his annoyance to the master.

"Well, well!" replied the latter, "now you are vexed; how long ago is it that you cared for nothing more than to have people think ill of you?"

Pavel turned red. "There's such a thing as having enough of it," he remarked, and Habrecht answered: "I should think so. I'f a fellow has brought a thrashing upon himself, and braves it out at first and says: 'go on,' he 'll get enough at last, too, and then he says: 'stop!' But it's just then that those who are thrashing him take the greatest pleasure in the job. How was it with me, and how long is it since I laughed when people came to me and begged me to use my arts to protect their fields against hail, or their barns against lightning? And I felt flattered! Oh, my dear boy! and to-day I would like to fall upon the neck of any donkey who thinks nothing more about me than that I am as stupid as he is himself!"

At the tavern, in the meantime, the peasants were consulting about selling the sand-pit to Pavel. Anton, the blacksmith, being asked his opinion on the matter, announced himself in favor of the sale.

The official declaration of innocence which Pavel had received had made an impression upon him, and the decision of the experts had confirmed him in the doubts which he had entertained from the beginning as to the lightness of poisons. His advice was: "Sell the sand-pit to the lad; he has money, let him pay."

This proposal was accepted.

Pavel was pronounced of age, and obtained the sand-pit at a high price, after he had been given to understand that the parish, which had supported him for the past seven years, could not be expected to make him a present of anything.

As for him, he did not consider his property too dearly bought. He thought the sum very small which had worked a miracle and made him,—the beggar, the child of the parish,—an owner of real estate. His patron and he concluded the day on which the contract was signed in the most solemn manner.

Habrecht lit a candle in addition to the little lamp. Pavel spread his treasures out before him: the certificate of the court, the bill of sale, the remainder of his savings, and Milada's little bag, with its contents still untouched. The money was counted, and an estimate made of the expenses of building the house. About the bricks there was no difficulty; Pavel was to make them, with the master's permission, in the field of the latter, and clay was to be found in great plenty in the neighborhood. On the other hand, the necessary timber would be hard to procure; the funds on hand did not suffice for that, and the requisite sum could hardly be accumulated before the following autumn. Fortunately, the frame-work of the roof would be the last thing to be considered. Pavel's most immediate care was directed to the levelling of his ground and the raising of his four walls. Enough for the beginning, enough for one who, for the management of his affairs, has only the time left over from his work in the service of others.

When all this was satisfactorily arranged, the young fellow got out his writing-materials, and, amid heavy sighs and with greater exertions then the felling of a tree would have cost him, indited the following letter:

Milada,

my darling sister I have been to see you three times but the nuns would not allow it the master has written you about it. Milada I have bought the sandpit where I am going to build the house for me and mother, ask the baroness to let me go to you because I am innocent and have got a paper from the court that they can't punish me I have got new clothes too and I don't want to be a farm servant in the convent now because I have got the sandpit. So the nuns ought to let me see you.

Pavel also wrote to his mother the same evening, and told her that when her time in the penitentiary was out, she would find a home with him.

From his mother he soon received a letter full of love, gratitude and longing. Milada's answer was long delayed, and when it came, it brought with it a bitter disappointment.

Dear Pavel: I have always known that you were innocent—his sister wrote—and have rejoiced and thanked God that He held you worthy to suffer innocently, after the pattern of our sweet Saviour. And now I must tell you something, dear Pavel. I have not seen you for a long time, but that was only obedience, and not a voluntary sacrifice, and has not been imputed to me for righteousness by my Redeemer. Now, however, the Reverend Mother Superior has given her permission that you may come and see me, and now only I can make a voluntary sacrifice. I do so, Pavel, and I beg of you, dear Pavel, do not come to me, wait another year, wait without murmuring, for only a sacrifice which we cheerfully lay at the foot of the cross is acceptable to God and is imputed by Him to them for whom we make it. Let us renounce cheerfully, you know that we do it for the souls at our parents, who have no other intercessors with their eternal judge than us. Do not come, therefore. But even if you did come, dear, dear Pavel, it would be in vain—you would not see me, I should ask the good nuns to hide me from you, you would have to go away again without having seen me, and would only have made my heart indescribably heavy, for I love you, dearest Pavel, more, I am sure, than you love yourself.

"Well, what does your sister write?" asked Habrecht, who saw the lad staring, with an expression of dismay, at the letter, the fine, regular writing of which he had slowly deciphered. Pavel suddenly bowed his head, large tear-drops fell from his eyes.

"What does she write?" repeated the master, but, on receiving no answer, did not ask again; he already knew, by experience, that "when that fellow wanted to conceal anything, there was no power on earth which could wrest his secret from him."

When Spring came, Pavel, in a succession of moonlight nights, made the bricks for his house. More than once he found his work destroyed when he returned from Zbaro at night. Little feet had run over the bricks while they were still soft, and had rendered them useless. Pavel watched for the delinquents, caught them, and took them to the curate. They received an admonition, which, however, had no effect; the mischief was repeated.

Then Pavel resolved to administer justice himself. Armed with a cudgel, he was about to post himself behind an old spreading walnut-tree, there await the enemy, who was advancing from the village, give him a sound thrashing, and send him home. To his utmost astonishment, however, he found the office of guard, which he was about to take upon himself, already supplied, and that by Virgil. He, too, had a stick in his hand.

"I'm on hand," he said. "I've driven away some of them already."

"What do you want, you rascal?" asked Pavel, harshly. "Away with you, you bad fellow. I'll have nothing more to do with you!" And he raised his cudgel.

Virgil had planted his stick on the ground, clasped his hands over it, and nearly bent himself double. Trembling and very humbly, he said:

"Pavlicek, don't beat me, let me stand here. I've come here to look after your bricks."

"You? indeed, you're just the one to look after anything, you! I know you! Go to the devil!"

"Don't speak of him," whimpered the old man, beseechingly, and his knees shook, "don't speak of him, for God's sake. I am old, Pavlicek, I am sure to die soon, you shouldn't say to me: 'Go to the devil!'"

"It's all the same whether I say it or not, and all the same whether you go or not, if you don't go of your own accord, he'll come and fetch you."

Virgil began to weep. "My old woman is going to die soon, too, and she's afraid. She wants to see you before she dies. And it was she who said to me: 'Go and look after his bricks.'"

Pavel examined him silently and attentively. How he looked, how strangely! quite shriveled and thin, trembling with cold in his thin clothes, and at the same time his face of the color of fire, like a red lamp, in which a burning wick is swimming. The oil which nourished this wretched existence was liquor; the only comfort which refreshed it, a thoughtless lip-prayer.

"Poor rogue," thought Pavel; "the times are gone, when you abused me—now you cringe before me. Stay then," he said, hesitatingly, and still full of suspicion, "I shall see what sort of a watchman you make."

When he returned, he found everything in order. Virgil really kept watch faithfully, asking neither praise nor wages, and only inquired again and again: "Won't you come and see the old woman?"

Pavel sent word to her that as far as he was concerned she might die in peace, but that he did not wish to go and see her. The chief cause of his refusal was the fear of meeting Vinska at her mother's and then not being able to evade her there, as he did scrupulously since she had become Peter's wife. And as he averted his eyes whenever he met her, as he closed his ears as far as possible to every intelligence of her, so he even drove away every thought of her that forced itself involuntarily upon him.

She had attained the object of her wishes, and he had helped her reach it; now all was over between them. What was it that still pained him, against his will, stronger than his own strength? what was it that tortured him at the sight of her? He folded his arms over his heart, and muttered, with an oath: "Stop throbbing!" But his heart did throb, nevertheless, when, handsomer than ever, she passed him on foot or in the light wagon in which, a year and a-half ago, Peter had taken him to court. She tried her best to look happy; it was hardly probable that she was so. Peter was a despotic and miserly husband, who had disappointed all Virgilova's expectations. His wife's parents were not allowed to come to his house, and what little Vinska could do to better their condition, was done in secret with fear and trembling.

Vinska herself lived in affluence, had celebrated, with much display, the christening of her second child, but the latter, like the first, born soon after the wedding, had died when only a few weeks old, and it was said in the village already that she would never be able to raise a child.

Pavel happened to be passing the house just as the little coffin was being carried out of the door very quietly and almost as if it were something to be ashamed of. And from the room inside there came the sound of sobs, sobs that cut him to the heart, and reminded him of the hour when she who uttered them lay on his bosom, and had importuned him with her entreaties and intoxicated him with her caresses.

Virgilova lived to see the death of her second grandchild, but shortly after her last hour came, preceded by a hard and terrible struggle.

She would not let the curate leave her bedside, but begged for prayers and blessings even at her last gasp; as her eyes grew dim, she asked the question: "Have my sins been forgiven?"

Pavel received the news of her death with indifference, and remained unmoved by the lamentations which Virgil struck up at the death of his wife. All that he said to the widower in consolation was: "The old woman's no great loss," and Virgil interrupted the manifestations of his sorrow, fixed his winking eyes upon Pavel, and asked, half convinced: "Do you think so?"

This took place at the end of the summer, and on the first Sunday after the event, the curate sent for Pavel to come to him.

It was after the benediction; the curate sat in his garden on the bench under his fine pear-tree, whose fruits were already assuming a golden tinge, absorbed in the reading of a newspaper. Pavel had been standing before him quite a while, without venturing to address the reverend gentleman, before the latter raised his small, pale face, overshadowed by his broad-brimmed straw hat, and said, after some hesitation: "You have been wronged." His eye glanced past Pavel and was fixed upon some point in the distance: "You are not to blame for the death of the burgomaster."

"Of course not," replied Pavel, "but, nevertheless, the children still run after me and shout after me: 'Poisoner!' I would entreat your Reverence to forbid their calling me poisoner."

"Do you suppose they do it with my permission?" asked the curate, in an irritated voice.

"And the grown people," Pavel continued, "are just the same. Three times I have planted small fir-trees on my land,—nothing else will grow there. Three times they have torn them up again. They say: 'Your house ought to have nothing around it; it ought to be so that people can look into it from all sides, and see what you are about!' "

The curate cleared his throat: "Hem, hem, that is because you have so bad a reputation. You must endeavor to improve your reputation."

Pavel muttered: "I have my certificate from the court."

"That is of no use if people don't believe in it," said the curate. "Faith is the chief thing, in great things as well as in small ones. For your eternal salvation you need to have faith in God, for your welfare here on earth it is necessary that others should have faith in you."

"That would be well, to be sure!"

"You mean it would be well if you could win that faith. Is not that what you wish to say?"

"Yes."

"Then try to do so. You have already entered upon a better path, and should now endeavor to progress in it. But you will hardly be able to do so without a support, you will need that some time longer. Until now, you could lean on the schoolmaster; but you will not be able to do so much longer."

"Why? Why not? Why not much longer?"

"Because he is going to be transferred to another school."

"Transferred!" cried Pavel, in dismay.

"Probably."

For a moment the curate looked firmly into his face, and then said: "More than probably, certainly. Make up your mind to it, and consider to whom you can apply when the master is gone, to whom you can say, in that case: 'I beg of you, be my friend and advisor.'"

After a pause, during which Pavel stood as if annihilated, the curate continued, sincerely attempting to force himself to feel at least the interest of a pastor in the clumsy youth, who was wholly repugnant to him: "Consider well, is there no one in whom you could feel enough confidence to speak thus to him?"

He was obliged to repeat the question before it was answered, and then the reply was so decided a "No one," that the curate did not, for the moment, undertake to shake this firm conviction.

"Indeed," he said, "no one! That is bad. But you had better reflect on the matter a little; you may think of some one yet." He leaned back against the tree again, gazed off into the distance, and concluded: "You can go home now, and you can tell the master that I shall probably call on him towards evening."

Pavel withdrew, confused, half-stunned. He felt as if he had received a blow on the head. At home he found the master sitting at the toble with his book before him, his face wearing the mingled expression of pain and delight, which it always assumed when he became absorbed in those beloved pages. Pavel sat down oppósite him, and observed him most intently. For a long time he did not venture to disturb him; but, finally, without intending to, and almost against his will, he broke out into the words:

"Master, what is this I hear about you?"

Hardly had he uttered this reproachful question when he was seized with alarm at the effect which it produced. Habrecht grew ashy pale, his eyes became dim, his lower jaw fell and trembled, he tried in vain to speak and uttered only incoherent, stammering sounds. Gasping for breath, he waved his hands about in the air, and sank back in his armchair with heavy groans. Pavel, who had never seen a person die, and thought it was a much easier matter than it is in reality, sprang from his chair, fell on his knees, and implored him, wringing his hands:

"Don't die, master; don't die!"

A faint smile stole over Habrecht's face. "Nonsense," he said, "there 's no question of dying, but of what you have heard about me. Confess!" he commanded, raising himself up, and rolling his eyes terribly. "How was it? what was the nonsense? cursed nonsense! No sensible person believes it, and yet it lives on faith, and rolls on and on in the darkness, in the depths. They tell it off on their fingers, and those who do not, count it. What have you heard? tell me!" He raised Pavel from the floor and shook him, but when the disconcerted youth was about to speak, he pressed his hand on his lips, and told him to be silent.

"What would you have to tell me? Nothing but what I have heard often enough to disgust me, to rob me of my sleep. Be quiet!" he cried. "I am going to speak out for once, miserable liar that I am. I am going to tell the truth; I, poor publican that I am, will tell it to you, another poor publican. Sit down, listen to me, bow your head. Even though it is but a miserable story, and the story of a deplorable folly, it is sacred, nevertheless, for it is true."

He went to the water-pitcher, took several long draughts, and then began, hastily, and in a low tone, to tell Pavel about the days when he was young, the son of a teacher, and the assistant of his sickly father, destined, by capacity and circumstance, by everything that was natural and reasonable, to be some day what the latter had been. In his heart, however, ambition was seething, vanity was spurring him on, these evil advisors turned his longing away from the easily-accessible goal, and held up to him a loftier aim as the only one worth striving for: the future of a great professor in a great city. This was what he dreamt of for himself, and his weak father for him, and this shadowy phantom of the future lived on and was nourished by the flesh and blood of reality, the strength, the health, the sleep of youth. How long can a candle burn that is lit at both ends? No one can be two persons at once with impunity—a teacher by day and a student by night. Still young as the first, but quite old as the second; for the time of which he could only use one half for his object, flew away with fearful rapidity. One morning he fell down unconscious at the door of the school-room. He still heard, as from a distance, a trembling cry of grief, saw, as through a mist, a beloved old face bending over him, then all was silence and darkness, and a soothing feeling of deep heavy repose came over him.

A long time passed; Habrecht lay ill, at first in wild, feverish dreams, then in a dull stupor. He was thought dead, laid in a coffin, and taken to the hall where dead bodies were deposited before burial. Here he awoke. His return to life only aroused horror; no one was left to rejoice at it. His father had died of fright and grief, and had been sleeping for some time under the green turf of the graveyard, and far rather would he who had risen from the dead have lain down beside him, than take up the struggle of life anew, broken man that he was. It was out of the question that he should continue his studies. He applied for the position which his father had held. He obtained it, to the dissatisfaction of the inhabitants of the village.

That one who has been dead three days should come to life again, is, in whatever light you look at it, most mysterious. Where was his soul during those three days? From what awful realm did it return? The strangest rumors began to circulate; the fable of the schoolmaster's sojourn in limbo was originated. And he let it pass. He was a poor, ruined man, who had feared hardly to be able to win the respect of the school-children, and who felt flattered when he observed that he inspired even adults with awe, and that it was but rarely that any one ventured to contradict him or act against his wishes. It was no longer possible for him to satisfy his worthy ambition: a false ambition took possession of him in its stead, and in order to appease it, he had recourse to ignoble means. He fostered the delusion which it would have been his duty to combat; he, a teacher, a propagator of truth on earth, a fighter against error, upheld falsehood, stupidity,--the enemy. He was a silent traitor to his own cause; he sustained prejudice, because it served the interest of his vanity.

The curate of his village, who saw through him, censured his course. His own conscience reproached him for the wrong he was doing. He determined to do it no longer, he made the resolve, and thought he could easily carry it out.

But, behold! what did he discover? The delusion which he had formerly sustained and now would have eradicated, *could* no longer be eradicated. Neither in a short nor in a long time, neither with slight nor with much trouble.

" I threw a twig to folly," he cried, " and it made a cudgel of it, with which it thrashed me. I played with serpents, and when I saw that I was doing a foolhardy thing, and would have ceased, it was too late, and they had twined around me so that I could no longer extricate myself."

Driven by a tormenting restlessness, he began his wonted perambulations about the room.

" If I were only a sincere criminal, a murderer, even—an honest murderer, and not the mendacious creature that I am—yes, *am!* for one can't get rid of it. Deceit eats into a man, and governs him against his will. It is terrible to want to be true, and no longer to be able to."

He stopped before Pavel, grasped both his arms, and shook him: "You will have the same experience, if you do not change your ways. Change them; you can yet do so."

"What shall I do?" asked Pavel.

"Tell no lies, say nothing about yourself that you do not know to be true; neither for good, for that is contemptible, nor for evil, for that is stupid. You make yourself the slave of every one whom you deceive, even though he be ten times worse and lower born than you. I know what you want to do: to show defiance, inspire fear. But wait till the day comes when you will want to reform,—it will come for you, too, it is dawning already—wait till you feel a horror of yourself."

"Master," Pavel interrupted him, "calm yourself, some one is knocking."

Habrecht started: "Knocking?—what?—who?—Ah—your Reverence!"

The curate had entered the room. "I knocked three times," he said, "but you did not hear me, you were talking so loudly." His shrewd, sharp eyes fixed themselves inquiringly upon the master, who was evidently disconcerted by his unexpected appearance.

"Oh, your Reverence, I am delighted—pray take a seat. Pavel, a chair," stammered Habrecht, hastening to the table, against which he steadied his trembling legs, and over which he held, as if in protection, his bent arms. With a self-betraying awkwardness which would have been difficult to equal, he thus directed the attention of the priest to the object from which he wished, at any price, to divert it, to the book lying open before him.

The curate approached the table from the other side, turned to the title-page before Habrecht could prevent it, and from his position, without turning the book, he read, with dismay, with loathing and with sorrow: "*Titi Lucretii Cari: De rerum natura.*"

He snatched his hand away, rubbed it off violently on his coat, and cried: "Lucretius! Oh, my dear Habrecht! Oh!"

And Habrecht, struggling in an agony of soul, slowly, painfully, collected himself—for a lie. "An accident," he stammered, "the book was accidentally left over—from the time of my philological studies, and turned up again only recently."

"I hope so, I wish it may be so, else I should have to pity you," replied the curate, still keeping him under the spell of his eye.

"And you would be right, you who have a heaven, and can promise it to any one who comes to you for consolation," Habrecht broke out.

And when the priest had left him, he took the well-thumbed volume, caressed it like a living thing, and hid it in his bosom—a friend whom he ever enjoyed with new delight, and yet ever denied.

CHAPTER XII.

BUILDING A HOUSE.

Pavel proceeded diligently with the building of his house, and it was finished, in spite of all the obstacles which were invented by mischief and malice in order to hinder the builder in the completion of the modest structure. There it stood at last, thatched with moss and straw, very low and very slanting. Poverty peeped out of the three small windows, and whoever was able to decipher invisible inscriptions, could read over the narrow door, hung on rough hinges: "By me poverty enters in." The cabin was an object of derision for everyone who passed it. Pavel, however, did not suffer anything to spoil his pleasure in his little house, but proceeded cheerfully to its interior arrangement. He had built a hearth and purchased a modest supply of boards. In order to examine the latter with him, the school-master came to see him one day. They consulted on the subject, turned every board around at least ten times, and deliberated how it could be put to the best use. Suddenly Pavel lifted his head and listened. The sound of a vehicle rolling heavily up the hill was heard.

"The Baroness is coming this way," cried Pavel, "she has not seen my house yet; I wonder what she will say when she sees that I have a house."

In fact, the old lady was not yet acquainted with Pavel's structure. Her drives were generally taken in another direction. The bad, steep road through the village she passed over only once a year, when she paid a visit to her old pensioned forester, who lived higher up. This she was about to do to-day, and would have done oftener, if Matthias, the lackey, had not invariably had some good reason for advising against the excursion to the forester's house. The reason which furnished *him* with all these reasons was that he was subject to gout in his legs, was very averse to walking, and knew very well that at the end of the village, where the road became steeper, his mistress would say: "Get down, Matthias, you are too fat, the poor horses can't pull you."

When Pavel perceived the approach of the carriage, Matthias had just been ordered down from the box, and was very much out of humor as he walked along behind the big calash, in which sat the Baroness, equally out of sorts. She was vexed at the stooping shoulders of her coachman, and attributed them to a want of respect, while they were only the result of burdening years. The mistress said aloud to herself: "I wonder why people can't sit straight now-a-days! Such manners! It's a shame when any one don't care a straw how he looks!" She herself sat up straight as an arrow, and stretched herself as much as she could in order to set a good example, which it must be said was of little use under existing circumstances. At the same time she looked about her with animation and curiosity, through the huge spectacles which she was in the habit of wearing during her drives. Arrived at the sand-pit, she perceived the new structure, and cried:

"Matthias, who has been building a stable there? What stable is that?"

Matthias hastened his steps, took off his hat, and answered: "That is a cabin."

"Good gracious! Who has been building that for himself?"

Matthias smiled contemptuously:

"It was Pavel who built that; that Holub fellow."

"God save us! does *he* build houses?"

"Yes," continued Matthias, laying his hand on the carriage-door familiarly; "they say it's for his mother, so that she'll have some place to go to when she comes out of the penitentiary. It 'll be a thieves' den; it's well that it stands so by itself, without any trees or bushes around it, and so far from the village."

During this conversation the carriage had arrived in front of the cabin, from which it was separated only by the grassy border of the road, and the narrow space upon which Pavel had laid out his boards.

The Baroness ordered the coachman to put on the brakes and stop. She leaned out of the carriage, and asked:

"What boards are these?"

Habrecht approached the carriage and saluted the old lady.

"Ah," said the latter, "you here? I am glad, for I suppose you can tell me what boards these are?"

"They are from the Manor saw-mill, your Grace."

"And how did they get here?"

"As the property of Pavel Holub, who has bought them."

"Bought them?" replied the Baroness; "that is hard to believe, that *he* should have bought anything."

Pavel, until then, had stood motionless behind the schoolmaster. At the old lady's last words he started, turned, sprang into the cabin, and returned immediately, holding a sheet of paper in his hand, which, without a word, he handed to the Baroness.

"What is this?" she asked, "what is he giving me here?"

"The receipted bill for the boards," replied Habrecht, to whom the question was addressed.

"Indeed! So he makes purchases and pays bills? Where does he get the money for that? I have heard that he stole a bag of money once."

"An old story, your Grace, which was not even true when it was still new."

"I know you always take his part. According to you, I am always wronging the bad fellow."

"He is no longer bad. Those times are over; your Grace may believe me."

"Why don't he speak for himself? Why is he standing there like evil conscience personified? Excuse yourself," continued the old lady, addressing Pavel, "say something, ask for something. If I had known that you were building a house and needed boards, I would have made you a present of them. Can't you ask? Is there nothing that you would like to ask me for?"

At this Pavel raised his eyes to the old lady. Timidly, doubtingly, he looked at her. She no longer asked it he had a request to make, after those sad eyes had gazed at her, and she had read in them so much mournful, inexpressibly deep longing.

"Well, what would you like? Speak out."

Pavel hesitated a moment, collected himself, and said, with considerable distinctness and firmness:

"I would like to ask your Grace to write to my sister Milada; to let me go to see her."

The Baroness shook her head impatiently. "I can't do that. I can't meddle with such things; that is the nuns' affair. No one can go and see Milada at any time, whenever they feel like it. I can't do it either. Milada no longer belongs to us now; she belongs to Heaven. The fellow always says the same thing over and over again;" she went on, turning to Habrecht again. "I can't understand how you can say that he is changed. And now we 'll go on. Good-by! Drive on, Jacob."

The carriage started, but had rolled only a short distance, when the Baroness again ordered the coachman to halt, beckoned to Habrecht, and asked:

"What about the new schoolmaster? Why does he not come? He was to have presented himself to-day."

"Your Grace will excuse me, to-morrow."

"How to-morrow? Is n't to-day Wednesday?"

"Begging your pardon, to-day is Tuesday."

"Tuesday! well, that makes a difference. I was inclined to think that the young man, who is probably a learned boor, found it superfluous to make his bow to the lady of the manor. And when do you leave, Schoolmaster?"

"Next week, your Grace."

"It's a pity, a great pity that you must go. We'll find no one that's better than you," said the Baroness, and then, with a gracious salute to Habrecht, she drove on.

When the master turned to Pavel, he was standing motionless, and scarlet in the face.

"Then it is true, after all," he asked, swallowing with as much difficulty as if he were being strangled. "You are going away?"

"That is, I am being sent away," replied Habrecht, hesitatingly; "I have been transferred."

"Far away?"

"Rather far."

"Have you known it long, master, that you had been transferred?"

"Long—or not long—just as you look at it."

"Why did you not tell me of it?"

"What for—did you not hear of it, anyway?"

"But I would n't believe it; I would n't believe His Reverence, and the others still less. I thought that if it were true, you would tell me of it yourself—" he could not go on.

The sight of Pavel's sorrowful dismay cut his old friend to the heart, but he would not let him see it. "Don't grudge me my good fortune," he suddenly exclaimed, after a few moments of silence; "only think, I shall be among nothing but strangers. If any one looks at me, I shall look back at him quite calmly, and never trouble myself to ask: 'What have you heard about me, what mysterious things do you think me capable of?' I shall command and enjoy the respect which I know how to win, the highest respect, for I shall be like an angel, like a saint, and even the worst of them will have to admit: 'That schoolmaster is an excellent man!' Thus it will be there; while here—" he pressed his hands against his temples, and gave a heart-breaking moan. "An example," he continued, "I will give you an example to show you how it is here and how it will be there. Imagine a large slate, white as snow, which I ought to have covered with fine, regular characters, but instead, I once scribbled over the clean surface, and bedaubed it; and now, when I want to do as I ought and trace handsome letters, I cannot do so at once—the nonsensical stuff that disfigures the slate must first be rubbed out. Oh, how hard, how impossible! And even when I think that it is effaced, and no trace of it left, it still re-appears beneath my carefully traced characters. Paler from year to year, indeed, perhaps—but what is the use? On the other hand, my eye has grown more sensitive, and the impression remains the same. Do you understand me? That will all be different now. There in my new home the slate is clean, as it was here in the beginning, when it was intrusted to me. The slate is my reputation. Do you understand me or not? Child of misfortune, I don't believe you have understood a word that I have said."

Pavel did not defend himself against this suspicion; he was occupied with other thoughts, and suddenly he cried: "I know what I 'll do—I 'll go with you!"

"Don't think of such a thing," Habrecht blurted out, but in order to lessen the harshness of his repulse, he added, in explanation: "What would become of your mother, if she did not find you here on her return?"

"She can come after us if she wants to," replied Pavel, pulling at his lips, as children are wont to do when embarrassed. And, as if he were a child, Habrecht admonished him to resign himself, to remain where he was, gave him reasons for it, and, when Pavel shook his head at everything, concluded impatiently: "And, finally! people would soon know where your mother had come from, and would ask: 'What followers are these whom the schoolmaster has brought to our village?' That cannot be—you must see it yourself, you must listen to reason." With this he turned away, and, wiping from his brow the perspiration which had gathered on it in spite of the cool autumn atmosphere, he hastily took refuge in flight, in order to escape any possible new propositions of Pavel's.

He need not have feared anything of the kind. The youth did not allude again to the approaching separation; he only grew more quiet, more sad, but continued his industrious life, and did not seek his patron's society oftener than at any other time.

And Habrecht, with the selfishness of an invalid, who will not give heed to any care but that for his recovery, did not wish to know anything about the struggle which was hidden beneath Pavel's apparent calmness, preferred to ignore a suffering which it was impossible for him to relieve. They must needs part; better, then, that they should do so without any expressions of regret.

Moreover, Habrecht almost forgot his protege in the annoyance caused him by his successor.

That young gentleman, whose name was George Mladek, had arrived several days later than he had been looked for, had enjoyed the surprise which Habrecht expressed at this fact, and, when he found that he was expected to go to the castle and pay his respects to the Baroness, had answered :

"With the greatest pleasure, if she is young and handsome ! Otherwise, I have nothing to do with baronesses, and nothing to seek in their castles."

"But politeness requires—"

"Not of every one—I, for instance, am without prejudices."

He rather piqued himself upon being as poor as Job and as proud as Diogenes, moved into the schoolhouse at the head of one trunk, a cot-bed, a table and a chair, thought himself sufficiently provided for for the beginning, and declined with thanks his predecessor's ready offer of sundry household articles.

So Habrecht's furniture was transferred to the hut in the sand-pit, briefly christened by the popular mouth "the pit-cabin," and there produced quite a favorable effect, as well as much envious feeling. People found Habrecht's generosity towards Pavel incomprehensible, and hardly pardonable. Mladek, however, had his own ideas with regard to the relation between the two, and had no reason to conceal them from his "colleague."

On the eve of the day fixed for Habrecht's departure, he went to see him, and found him in the schoolroom, where, standing at the window, he was looking out on the street in impatient expectation. When Mladek spoke to him, Habrecht turned round, and said:

"Oh, it's you—I'm glad it's you; I was afraid it was someone else."

"Who did you think it was?"

"Well, I thought it was Pavel, you know. To tell the truth, I intend to leave to-day, and without saying good-bye, on the lad's account. I rejoice at going away from here; I cannot conceal it, and that hurts him. So I have taken leave of the curate and the Baroness, and mean to be off before Pavel comes home. I have ordered a wagon to meet me yonder, at the gate. It ought to be here by this time."

He hastened to the window again, and leaned far out of it. The wind played with his scanty hair, the thin strands of which flew in all directions about his head and his face, which looked so old, and harmonized so little with his youthfully slender and agile figure. He wore the black suit which his father had made for him for his last examination, and which, intended for a bodily increase of its possessor—which never took place—hung more and more loosely about his gaunt limbs in proportion as the cloth grew more threadbare and its folds softer.

Mladek examined him through his sharp eyeglasses, and asked:

"How long have you been schoolmaster here?"

"Twenty-one years."

"And after twenty-one years you decamp, as if you had stolen something? You deprive the children of the pleasure of a farewell celebration, and the grown people of that of a banquet, and all that only not to see your Pavlicek in tears? Strange! Methinks thereby hangs a tale, my dear colleague. Eh?"

Habrecht turned pale beneath the inquisitorial look which was fixed upon him.

"What tale?" he asked, and his tongue seemed paralyzed.

"Don't be afraid of me. I can understand human failings," replied Mladek, with superiority. "Honestly, colleague, confess! Was your Pavlicek's mother—who, by the way, is in the penitentiary at present, as I hear,—was she a handsome woman?"

Habrecht did not at once grasp the meaning of this question; but when it struck him, he laughed out loud, laughed more and more gaily, more and more heartily, and cried, in the happiest excitement: "Well—what an idea! Oh, you clever fellow, you! Oh, this *is* a joke. Good heavens, how shrewd you are!" He broke out into renewed laughter. The morbidly sensitive man, who was wounded to the depths of his soul by the slightest allusion to a suspicion awakened by himself, felt as if purified by this entirely unfounded supposition. No praise, no flattery could have made him so happy as did his successor's false and low inference. He did not observe that he gave offence by his merriment; he became quite animated, and cried: "I wish you were right! It would be better for the lad. But you are not right, and his father really died on the gallows; a misfortune for which the son is held accountable. He must be protected against stupidity and malice. I have done it; do you do it, too? Promise me that you will."

Mladek nodded with a sourish-sweet expression in his face; but inwardly he puffed himself up venomously, and thought:

"As a reward for your laughing at me on his account! That 's very likely!"

In the meantime a wagon was heard slowly approaching. "My vehicle!" said Habrecht, took up his valise, and, with Mladek's help, lifted it to his shoulder. He refused any further assistance, and particularly Mladek's company to the wagon, and hastened away, without casting back a single glance at the scene of his work for many years. No feeling of sadness arose in his breast at parting. "Go on," he called out to the peasant who was to drive him, as he returned his salute, "and if anyone asks you whom you've got in your wagon, just tell them: a bridegroom—you can safely say so, for many a man has gone to his wedding who was not as happy as I." With this he climbed into the wagon, stretched himself at full length in the thickly piled-up straw which it contained, and jubilantly cried: "Go ahead!"

The villagers returned from the fields somewhat earlier than usual on that day; they were in haste to make their preparations for the farewell festivities in honor of the schoolmaster. The chimney of the tavern had been emitting smoke for some hours; those who had anything to say in the matter went to look after the state of affairs in the kitchen; others remained in the neighborhood, in order at least to inhale the good smell of cooking which began to fill the air roundabout. The boys assembled in swarms, and as they had to look forward to walking quietly for a good while in the procession the next day, they made up for it in advance, and were thrashing each other now without regard to order. In the houses and in front of them, the mothers were braiding red ribbons into the little girls' hair, and in the stables the peasant-lads were doing the same with the manes of the horses. The result was a number of queues, stiff as wire, which produced on the heads of the girls, and the necks of horses, a very neat and well-kept effect. In a word, the preparations for the festival were in full progress, when the intelligence of Habrecht's sudden departure was circulated. At first no one would believe it; it was only when the peasant who had taken the schoolmaster to the railroad-station returned, and brought his cordial farewell greetings to the villagers, that they were obliged to cease doubting, willing or unwilling.

There was only one, who, returning home from his day's work, could not be shaken in his conviction that Habrecht was still there, must be there still. He vouchsafed no answer to those who mocked him for it, but ran to the school-house, and unceremoniously entered the school-room, where he found Mladek. Shortly and peremptorily he asked: "Where is the master?"

Mladek, who was sitting at a table and writing, turned his head: "Here is the master," he said, pointing to himself, "and nobody is to enter his room without knocking, remember that, you lubber."

Pavel stammered an excuse, and begged to be told where the former master was.

"Decamped, and you had better decamp too," was the answer.

Pavel descended the stairs slowly, entered the school-room, stood there awhile, and waited; and when he whom he expected did not come, he went into the little garden, in which he walked to and fro, watching, listening. Suddenly he struck his forehead. Blockhead that he was, that he had not thought of that before! It was to *him*, to *his* house that the master had gone, to say good-bye to him, to him alone! Reviving with the hope so suddenly sprung up within him, he ran through the village to his cabin, and when he reached it, called out: "Master!"

No answer; all silent here too; and now Pavel comprehended that he sought his old patron in vain.

In the middle of the room stood the table at which he had so often sat opposite to him, in front of it his thin-legged easy-chair, and against the wall his wardrobe, brown with age. The sight of all these effects cut Pavel to the soul, and roused him to anger. He flung the arm-chair into a corner, and gave the table a kick, which caused it to upset with a crash. What did he want with that stuff? What did he want with mementoes of him who had deserted him so faithlessly?"

Gone, gone! his only friend! Gone, without even having said "God bless you!" What sort of a man was he, that he could do that? Better a thousand times that he had died, so that Pavel could have wept beside his coffin, and thought: "He loved you to the last." But to glide away thus, like a shadow, that caused all his kindness and friendship to seem shadowy, too.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE FALL OF PETER.

At harvest-time that same year, an important event took place. The parish carried out a project which had long been entertained by them; they bought for their threshing-machine, hitherto worked by horse power, a steam-motor. It was fetched from the railroad-station, and entered the village drawn by six horses, and decorated with flowers. Proudly the peasants strode along beside it, and not one of them allowed his pleasure in the valuable acquisition to be spoilt by the consideration that only the first instalment of the ten, in which it was to be paid for, had been handed over, and that it was for the present quite uncertain where the money for the remaining nine was to come from.

Not far from Pavel's cabin, on an eminence overlooking the village, stood the house of the newly-elected burgomaster. There it was that the steam-motor began its functions; it puffed and snorted, and the threshing-machine, having been connected with it, swallowed the sheaves furnished it, and spat out with a rapidity heretofore unknown the hulled grain and the broken straw. At first, crowds assembled to witness the pretty sight, but by degrees the interest of the majority in the endless monotony dwindled away, and there was only one in whom it remained undiminished, and he was one who hardly had a chance of ever employing the motor in his own service, namely, Pavel. He had got work in felling wood in the manor-forest, and every day, in going there, went out of his way a little, in order to enjoy the sight of the snorting monster, to which he gave himself up with silent wonder, until he was told to "Get out." "If he could get the motor away by staring at it, he'd do it," remarked the burgomaster. Pavel went, but took the memory of the object of his admiration with him, and had a clearer idea of it in his head than the peasants who sat close by it on the bench by the barn, and supervised the work of the day-laborers.

Well pleased, the owners of the grain which happened to be undergoing the process of threshing looked on, and rejoiced when the industrious machine accomplished in a few days the work which would have kept them busy for months. Soon the question was raised among them whether a part of the great amount of time which they now had to spare, should not be devoted to the pastime of hunting, so extremely attractive to the peasant. The next year their lease from the manor would expire, and then they would consider well before they renewed it. The matter was often discussed, and found only a few opponents in the parish, but among these there was one who was very influential and very decided, and that was Peter. From pure avarice, as his enemies asserted, he grudged the money for the hunting-license, for powder and bullets. He did not deny this, and declared that he needed his money for "something more sensible." Then the mockers would regularly say, tauntingly, that "he spent all his money in oats for his sorrels, so that they should pick up a little."

This always had the result of making Peter furious.

He took great pride in a horse-breeding establishment, which his father had successfully carried on before him, and had lately gone to a prize exhibition of draft-horses with two sorrels, the sight of which, as he often boasted, "would knock over the committee, and run all the other horses present into the ground." Instead of that, he had come back angry, and full of abuse of the committee, which, as he said, was composed of nothing but asses. He was generally scoffed at in the village; every one knew that the sorrels had been found too weak for draft-horses, and now Peter had set his mind on making them the strongest horses far and near, and was only watching for an opportunity to give a brilliant proof of his success. The wished-for moment seemed at last to have arrived. When the motor had done its duty by the burgomaster's grain and that of his neighbors, it was to be removed to Peter's farm, at the lower end of the village, and he had impatiently awaited the time when he could go and fetch it. On the day fixed, while the motor was still at work, he appeared, his face puffed out like a balloon, with his man behind him, leading the sorrels, all ready harnessed.

"What are going to do with those horses?" asked the burgomaster; "why didn't you bring a pair of strong oxen? Those horses can't hold back the machine going down the hill."

Barosch and Anton, who happened to be standing by, as well as several younger peasants and all the laborers, were of the same opinion. Even Pavel, who had been sent by the forester with a message to the burgomaster, took the liberty of opening his lips in the presence of the notables, and said: "And the greatest harm may be done to the machine."

Peter transferred his short pipe from the left corner of his mouth to the right, and pushed his hat farther back on his head. “Put the horses to the machine,” he commanded peremptorily, and took the reins off the sorrel's backs.

“Wait,” cried the burgomaster. “You're not going to start like that; you must have the fire put out first.” He opened the door of the coal-box, and Barosch approached with the poker, but Peter roared at him:

“Let it alone! Just at it is, my horses will draw it,” and then he closed the door of the coal-box again vehemently, helped his servant attach the horses, and seized the reins and the whip.

“Get up!”—a loud click of the tongue; the horses started, sprang to one side, sprang upward, and only after a second and third click they strained at the harness so that the traces creaked. The machine had moved. Peter shouted, his man swore; the peasants and the laborers stood astonished, for actually—the sorrels drew the motor to the entrance of the yard. From here progress was easy; the road descended gently, and widened as it turned into the village-street. On the latter the incline grew steeper. Pavel ran forward to lock the wheels, but Peter, completely intoxicated with pride and love of boasting, pushed him aside: “There's no need of that,” he cried; “I can do without the drag.”

"How foolish," remarked Anton, because the road grew even steeper farther on; but Peter answered, with a laugh, that he didn't care, his horses would run all the more quickly, and then he boasted that he would take the machine into his yard on a trot.

The announcement of this daring exploit gave rise to mockery and curiosity. But it would be great fun to watch such a feat. Anton alone disapproved of the matter decidedly, crossed his hands with a gesture of regret, and said: "He won't listen to anything; he'll see."

"*You* will see, *all of you*, what my sorrels can do," Peter retorted, as he walked along beside the horses with long steps, no longer shouting "get up," however, but "whoa, whoa!"

The horses bore up bravely against the enormous load which rattled along behind them and crowded upon them; they fairly crept, with their back-bones drawn in, their heads high, their necks stiff, their collars pushed up to their jaws. Peter clung to the reins as firmly as he could.

"Don't let them get into a run, for God's sake," his man called out to him across the horses, and he did not reply; he was frightened enough by this time at the thought of his boast about the trot. Only a few steps more, and then they would come to the first water-drain which crossed the road; this he was hoping for, it would hold the heavy monster back for a moment, and the sorrels would be able to take breath.

"Whoa, whoa!" a jerk; the front wheels roll into the depression, but out again immediately, and at the same time the door of the coal-box, so carelessly closed by Peter, flew open, and the contents of the latter falls out upon the haunches, the hind-legs of the horses. They act as if mad. No wonder!

"Lock the wheels—put on the brake!" Peter now roared. It was far too late; there was no possibility of holding back. The horses went down the hill at a galop; the machine creaked and rattled, and Peter, entangled in the reins, half running and half being dragged, rushed on alongside. A howling troop followed him; others stood as if rooted to the spot. Every one saw plainly what must happen the next moment. The steep road was crossed by another, deeper drain, and then led around the corner, past the fence of the tavern-garden and the opposite wall, which enclosed Peter's farm, into the great gate, of which there was no longer any possibility of turning. As the horses were rushing along to the left, as the machine was leaning towards the left, just on the point of falling, there was nothing to look for but a crash in the ditch, and Peter—may

God have mercy on his soul—he would be sent out of this world without absolution, he would be crushed between the fence and the machine. All knew it; all stared at the spot where the catastrophe would take place; some broke out into loud cries, some swore, others could not utter a sound; each one had a different expression for his suspense, his fear; in some isolated cases, a loud horse-laugh was even heard. Nobody seemed to think that anything could be done to avert the accident. And as the people were all standing there, or running about and clasping their hands above their heads, they suddenly saw Pavel spring at the fence like a stone that had been thrown by a powerful hand, seize the corner-post, and shake it. A mystery, a miracle how the thought had come to him: "Peter must be crushed between the fence and the machine; if there were no fence, he would not be crushed; therefore, away with the fence!"

All happened at the same moment. The post gave way before the athletic force of the youth, sank down, pulled a part of the fence with it, and simultaneously the motor fell heavily on one side. Smoke arose, dust was stirred up, horses' feet struck out into the air—men and women and bold children crowded around the spot. A few old women, who could neither see nor hear any trace of Peter, disputed as to whether both his legs or both his arms had been knocked off. "I only hope that the machine has had nothing knocked off," said the new burgomaster, with a sigh, thus expressing the feelings of most of the men present. A lively anxiety concerning the common property was universally displayed, and with it, great indignation towards him who had so recklessly endangered it.

Peter had been dragged from beneath the motor bleeding and badly cut, and set upon his feet; but nobody paid any attention to him when he fell to the ground again; and when he gasped, hoarsely: "The horses, help them," the general displeasure rose, and he narrowly escaped a drubbing. Pavel, however, thought to himself: "If it had n't been for me, all would be over with him now," and he was seized with a sentimental feeling of self-approbation, and a kind of good-will towards his worst enemy. He approached him, and when he noticed that he was bleeding from the mouth, he took hold of him under his shoulders and dragged him a short distance, so that he could place his head on a slight elevation in the turf. Suddenly, however, and not very gently, he let him fall again; a piercing cry had struck his ear: "Vinska!" flashed across his mind, "it's the devil that's sending her here now!"

It was she. She had taken advantage of Peter's absence to pay a visit to her father. Just as she left his cabin, she had heard the noise in the street and seen the people running towards her house from all directions. Seized with anxiety, she had taken a short cut through the village and the tavern-garden, and the first thing which she saw in the latter was her husband lying on the grass covered with blood, and Pavel bending over him—unharmed.

A wild suspicion flashed up within her: "Scoundrel, this is your work!" she cried, clinched her fist, and gave Pavel, who looked up at her in silence and alarm, a blow in the face.

At this, Anton checked the zeal with which he had been assisting in disentangling the horses from their traces, and said, calmly: "You would do better to thank him than to abuse him; if he had not lent a hand, you would have a husband as thin as a gingerbread-man now."

His remark called forth much hilarity. Vinska alone took no notice of it, and, altogether, knew nothing of what was going on around her. She had thrown herself on the ground beside Peter, and had burst into sobs. Pavel slowly rose from his knees. With fixed eyes he looked on as she fondled and kissed the wounded man; cold chills ran over him while he listened, as she implored him not to die, and called the coarse fellow her darling, her joy, her life, her one and all. Passionately Pavel's burning eyes were fixed upon her; a white border appeared around his tightly-closed lips, and between his thick eyebrows and on his forehead thunder-clouds gathered, betokening a storm of gloomy and agonizing thoughts.

At last, with a violent wrench, he turned away from the spectacle which attracted him and yet tortured him, and went to give his aid in the raising of the motor. When, with great trouble, this had been accomplished, and Anton expressed the opinion that, "the creature," thank God, had not been injured, and could be put in operation again at once. Pavel shook his head, and said, pointing to the rod which moves the sliding-valve: "I doubt whether it will work. Don't you see that that little rod is bent?"

The blacksmith also shook his head, contemptuously widened his mouth, which was surrounded by a scanty, dust-colored stubble-beard, and replied that if "anything" was bent, he would "see about it," and if "anything" was wanting, he would "set it right."

Pavel now gave the burgomaster the forester's message,—as yet undelivered,—and returned to the forest, where he fell upon his work like a lion upon his prey. Every time he lifted the axe, and brought it down whizzing through the air, it seemed as though he were collecting all his strength, and would spend it all on one blow. The professional woodcutters frequently interrupted their own work in order to watch that of this amateur with mocking malevolence. The leader of the "gang" in which Pavel had been enrolled, a coarse fellow named Hanusch, remarked to him: "Tear yourself to pieces if you like, but you won't get a kreuzer more for your work than any of the rest of us."

He did not, however, create only dissatisfaction. At the end of the week, when he went to the forester with his companions to receive his pay, the former had some encouraging words for him, and told the keeper to keep his eye on "that fellow who worked like mad," and, at the first opportunity, to give him the preference before all the other day-laborers.

Soon after this, on the first of September, St. Aegidius Day, the church in Soleschau celebrated its annual festival.

Everything was as it always had been. The fair-booths stood in their accustomed places; the whole population of the village assembled on the meadow between the big elm and the parsonage-garden. The Baroness, who at other times humbly trotted and waddled to church on foot, on this occasion traversed the short distance between the castle and the church in her carriage, with the greatest elegance and display; Jacob and Matthias on the box, reminding one of huge striped caterpillars, in blue coats with yellow bands down the back, with yellow waistcoats and facings, the fat white horses in heavy, silver-mounted harness. And, seated in the capacious barouche, the little, old half-blind woman, who bowed to right and left at a venture, who thanked many a lout, staring impudently into her face, with a pleasant nod, and left many a respectful salute unanswered, but who, arrived at the church, alighted, and got into a crowd, against which she bore up very bravely, as usual,—everything as usual.

She listened to every one who had a complaint or a request to make, she demurred at no kiss on her hand, however doubtful its source, no petitioner was turned away unheard; if nothing else, he received a ready answer, and for those who desired nothing but to pay their respects, she had always some little joke, or a sympathizing inquiry, which, to be sure, was not always delivered at the right address; she would ask an unmarried girl after her child, a young husband after his sweetheart,—but that did not matter, and only heightened the cheerful spirit of the assembly, which was allowed to manifest itself undisguisedly. The lady of the manor loved a jest, and forgave it, even if it was made at her expense, because she was conscious of being, in the main, esteemed by her people,—and herein lay her strength. She did not doubt that her people deceived her and stole from her, whenever they had an opportunity, but she forgave them their dishonesty, too, because she was conscious of being loved by them,—and herein lay her weakness.

The first bell sounded. The curate appeared at the church-door in a cloud of incense, surrounded by three assistants; mass was read, as Jacob expressed it from a coachman's point of view, "four-in-hand" on this occasion.

"Make way," cried the Baroness, to the crowd, "let me go to church, I must pray for you!"

"We'll do it for your Grace, it's our duty, your Grace," said the people, and made room for her, and the old lady approached the curate, who offered her the holy-water, crossed herself devoutly, and disappeared in her oratory.

Everything is as it always has been. The only unusual feature is the beauty of the weather, at which even the most crabbed weather-prophet could not have taken exception. A green autumn had succeeded the damp summer—a sunny autumn, which admitted of bringing in the rich harvest slowly and without interruption. All those who had money to spend were in excellent humor, which showed itself at the booths in a lively desire to buy; men and women stood before them, examining the goods they offered, and haggling about them, leaving the conclusion of the bargain until after service.

The second bell. High time even for the less devout to enter the church, already half-filled. The procession of church-goers grows denser, the men file past the parsonage-garden, against the fence of which Pavel is leaning, as was the case seven years ago. Then he was a neglected, ragged boy; now we see him as a compact, strongly-built youth, who, in the matter of apparel, is distinguished from his companions only by the circumstance that his clothes set better and are better cared for than theirs.

After the men came the women. Pavel felt it in every nerve, in every doop of blood—the women were coming.

He leaned back against the fence, crossed his legs, and assumed an expression of indifference. What did he care for those who headed the procession, the girls? He had nothing to do with any of them; on the contrary, he felt more contempt for each one of them than they all together could muster for him, poor fools! After the girls came the married women, the young ones first, and among them one—

the one whose name he will never speak again, for whom he will be blind and dumb from now till his last hour. What he had done for her, he had never considered, never reflected upon; he had just done it, mechanically, under an irresistible compulsion, without any clear consciousness, without a thought of any merit on his part or any obligation on hers.

But the other day, in the tavern-garden, when she had accused and insulted him, the twilight suddenly vanished, and light and shade were sharply defined; then he told himself all that he had done for her—things unheard of, monstrous—and she? He counted up for the first time, and settled the account at once. All is over between him and her, she no longer exists for him. And yet he feels her approach! Why does he feel it, if all is over? He threw back his head and raised his eyes to the extreme top of the elm, and saw something up there which attracted his attention. In the midst of the green boughs, of the infinitude of leaves, a large dead branch, reaching up towards heaven. The sight went to his heart, as if he had discovered on the blooming body of one he loved some symptom of a grave disease.

Such a splendid tree, and decayed at the top!

"Pavel, Pavel, listen to me," said a well-known voice, and he trembled; he was afraid—of himself.

Will it come over him again, that horrible feeling? will those fiery claws lay hold of him again, compress his bosom, and rob him of breath?

Vinska repeated: "Pavel, listento me! I have wronged you, forgive me!" She said it sweetly, humbly; she stood there and begged his pardon in the presence of all those who had come with her, and among whom no one watched the little scene with such interested attention as a slender, fair-haired girl, half a stranger in the place, who was so attractive in appearance that Pavel was struck with her even at this significant moment. "I ought to know you," he thought, and in fact, he soon remembered that he did know her; her name was Slava, and it was she who, years ago, when he was being taken to court, had found the bitterest taunt for him, and had thrown the stone which now lay buried under his door-sill. She had not been seen in the village for years; it was said that she was in service in the city, and now she had come home, and was as beautiful as the Madonna in the altar-painting. Pavel looked alternately at her and at Vinska, and regarded the one as calmly as the other. O wonder, O joy, O victory! He has no occasion to envy any convalescent from a severe illness, any liberated prisoner. He is cured of the sickness of this love, he is rid of the fetters which he hated and could not strip off ; he is well, he is free !

"Forgive me," entreated Vinska anew, and he, with a composure which afforded him intense pleasure, replied :

"Let it be ; the times are over when anything of that kind would have troubled me."

She blushed, bit her lips, and went on towards the church. She carried away with her the humiliating feeling that she had been deprived of a power which she had considered it impossible to lose. The delicate fair-haired girl followed her. And Pavel set his arms a-kimbo, rocked his hips, and said to himself :

"Women, faugh, good for nothing but evil !"

CHAPTER XIV.

PAVEL'S TRIUMPH.

Peter was improving daily; he was allowed to talk again, and to eat whatever he liked; only shouting and smoking were still forbidden. During his illness he had not ceased to be afraid, at first of dying, and then of the bill which the doctor would send him. When the latter ceased his visits, and the bill did not come at once, Peter sent for it, but only to give it an ignominious reception. He laid it on the table, sat down before it, and began to abuse item after item wrathfully. His wife crept around him full of anxiety, begging him timidly not to excite himself so, which only made him rail the more. And that on purpose, "because he wanted to see whether the repairs which the old quack had made on him, and charged so enormously for, would at least hold out."

He had succeeded in working himself into a state of mind in which he temporarily lost the little sense which he possessed, and could hardly be held responsible, so that Vinska would have preferred to guard him against a meeting with outsiders, when there was a knock at the door, and the landlord of the tavern entered the room very inopportunely.

He doffed his hat politely, and Vinska thought, at the first glance: "He wants something, and something that he has no right to."

Peter did not reply to the inquiry after his health, with which his visitor introduced himself, but, when the latter was seated, merely pushed the bill in front of him, snorted: "There!" and looked at him askance keenly and expectantly.

The landlord became absorbed in the study of the document, and after a length of time which would have sufficed for learning it by rote, he said, enforcing his words with a slap on the paper:

"That is the doctor's bill."

"The doctor's bill; the rascal has overcharged me outrageously."

"I don't see it," replied the inn-keeper; "overcharge you, such save-all as you? that can't be done. The bills are all right, the doctor's and "—he smiled in some embarrassment, put his hand in his breast-pocket, and slowly pulled out a folded paper, which he held out to Peter, "and mine, too."

Peter started back as if a firebrand had been held in his face, and shouted at the top of his voice:

"*Your* bill?" What the devil could he make out a bill against him for; he did n't owe a kreuzer in the tavern, he never drank a drop that he did n't pay for at once.

"Well," the landlord replied, when he finally got a chance to speak, "the question was not about drops, but about a fence, namely, the fence of his garden, which had been damaged at the time of the accident to the steam-motor."

This threw Peter into the utmost rage. What in the world did the fence concern him? How could the host have the insolence to make him out a bill for the fence? The breaking down of the fence was the cause of the whole trouble. It was done at the very moment when Peter had been on the point of getting control of the horses again; he had it already, one tug, and they would have stood like walls, and would have made the turn into his gate like lambs. Of course, when a fence tumbles down just in front of their noses, such creatures will take fright, they are not cows. That was the way it happened. Peter swore to it solemnly, and he also swore that he would convince anyone who doubted it, by kicking him into the street. In his excitement he left the house, and went with the inn-keeper to the corner of his garden, to demonstrate the occurrence explicitly on the spot.

His wife looked after him anxiously. For seven weeks he had not left his room, and now he had gone out for the first time on a windy October day in light house-attire, hot with anger, and panting with excitement. She could hear him shouting across the street. When he had seen the fence, for the repairing of which he was expected to pay, he had given a jump as if mad. What did this mean? A cheat, a rascally cheat! The fence had been not merely set up again, but renewed. More than half of its rotten boards had been replaced by new ones. What? an old fence had fallen, and a new one risen up instead, and that at Peter's expense? He raved, he called on every passer-by to bear witness to the imposition which the inn-keeper wanted to make him the victim of. Before a rapidly increasing audience he told the story half a dozen times in succession, told it each time with new additions, which corroborated his assertion. That confounded "boy," who pulled down the fence, was to blame for everything, the shying of the horses, the fall of the steam-motor, the accident to Peter—the hero, who, even at the moment of urgent danger to his life, had remembered the saving of the parish-property, and, instead of springing aside, had, just at the last, given his horses a turn, a tug, which prevented the total ruin of the machine. At last he was so hoarse he croaked like a raven, and so exhausted that he could hardly stand. During the night he could not sleep for excitement, and in the morning he sent to the burgomaster, to the councilors, and to some of his friends, asking them to come to the tavern, where he wished to consult with them upon a serious matter. They came, and he explained that he demanded his rights, and that if the parish would not give them to him, he would get them from the district-court, from the circuit-court, from the Emperor himself.

The burgomaster heaved sigh upon sigh while Peter was speaking, smiled anxiously, looked pleadingly at the councilors for support. He was the gentlest man in the place, very young for his office, and, being somewhat better educated than the majority of his equals in station, was rather helpless when brought in contact with their want of refinement. Well, what were Peter's rights? he asked; and the latter, instead of answering, began to tell his story, which, since the day before, had grown even more remarkable, impossible, and redounding to his glory. The burgomaster shrugged his shoulders, the senior councilor went to sleep; Anton made his most expressive gesture of regret. Some wags undertook, in jest, to outvie Peter's boasts, thus causing great merriment. He hesitated awhile whether to join in the laugh or get angry, but decided for the latter.

"Did I pull down the fence?" he cried.

"No, no," was the answer.

"Then I shall not pay for it."

"No, no."

"But who will do it then?" whined the innkeeper, whose fat cheeks were covered with big drops of sweat.

"As you have made out the bill, no one; it is impudently high, in any case," said Anton, and the burgomaster nodded to him gratefully.

Barosch, however, who had just emptied his fifth glass of brandy, and would have been glad to get a sixth on credit, humbly bent his little round bullet-head to one side, and said:

"Why no one? Why not the one who pulled down the fence? Why not that boy?"

"That boy? that would—that might—ha, ha, the boy!" was repeated with chuckles, laughter, and mockery; but, nevertheless, it was not difficult to see that the proposition had met with favor.

Peter appropriated it at once, and claimed it as his property. That was the rights of which he had spoken, the satisfaction which was due him for the danger into which the boy had led him, for the self-sacrificing courage which he had displayed in saving the machine.

The senior councilor had just waked up, and interposed peevishly: that the saving of the machine was a confounded humbug. In being saved, the motor had received a knock that it could not get over. Anton was repairing it all the time, and could n't make it do. It panted as if it had consumption, and it's whistle, which used to be so clear, was now like the mewing of a sick cat. Anton was of the opinion that that made no difference; whistling and mewing amounted to about the same, but unfortunately he was forced to admit that the mechanical power of the machine was greatly diminished.

This declaration was received with a general murmur of dissatisfaction. Peter alone took no notice of it, but pounded on the table with his fists, and cried: "That boy must come here, and that boy must pay."

"He must come here, certainly," was heard on all sides, and the burgomaster, growing more and more impatient, the more powerless he felt to stem the current which public opinion had taken, said—only louder than was his wont on similar occasions:

"He must? What must he do? Certainly not that which you want of him," and replying to the objections which were loudly raised, he concluded: " He is not coming here, he will not come, he cannot come, because he and Arnost have been ordered out to their military duty, and have had to present themselves to-day."

This, of course, made a difference, and they would have to wait.

Pavel returned, indeed, the next morning, but remained at home only twenty-four hours, and spoke only to two persons, the burgomaster and Anton. To the former he reported himself in company with Arnost; they had both been so fortunate as to be detailed to the militia, but were obliged to enter at once.

The second, whom he met accidentally, Anton, the blacksmith, complained to him of his trouble with the motor, and asked him to come with him to Peter's yard, where it was still standing. At the first glance which Pavel cast upon it, he repeated what he had said before:

" Don't you see that that rod is bent?"

Anton admitted it, but was of opinion that such a trifle did not matter much.

" It matters everything," replied Pavel. " That's the reason it jerks so; that's the reason the slide does n't work well, and how is the steam to enter as it ought? At one time there is too much, at another too little."

He succeeded in convincing the blacksmith, and together they soon set the matter to rights.

Peter did not show himself, but they heard him in the barn, coughing violently.

"He has just ruined himself with shouting," said Anton; "the doctor goes to see him again."

This intelligence was received as indifferently as it was given. Pavel went home, set his house in order, locked it up, and started almost cheerfully for the place of his new vocation. The little that he had seen of military matters on the occasion of his presenting himself, had impressed him very favorably.

The blacksmith received much praise for the successful repairing of the machine, but he seemed loth to accept it, and changed the subject whenever any one began to speak about the matter. He could not bring himself to acknowledge that he had needed Pavel's help to discover the cause of the injury which the motor had received.

During Pavel's absence, the question as to who was to pay for the repairing of the broken fence, was brought before the parish-council. The innkeeper did not cease to urge his claim, and finally succeeded in bringing about a settlement of the matter. A majority decided:

"The boy is to pay; that has been agreed upon already."

"But what if he can't pay?" objected the burgomaster.

"Pooh! why can't he? He's got money, and if he has none, there is his house, that is worth a few florins, at any rate. The landlord can seize it if he likes."

And this decision was the final result of the discussion, in spite of the annoyance which it caused the burgomaster.

When Pavel returned, the inn-keeper at once went to see him, told him what had been determined upon in his matter, and ended with the assurance that nothing could be altered in the affair, and that Pavel would be obliged to pay without demur.

The latter opened his eyes wider and wider; he was boiling inwardly, although outwardly he seemed quite calm. Nevertheless, the fat little landlord began to feel quite uncomfortable at the sight of this calmness.

"Who decided that I should pay?" asked Pavel.

"Well, the parish—the burgomaster, the peasants."

"The burgomaster, the peasants," repeated the youth, and advanced a step towards him, while the inn-keeper retreated several steps.

"You had better pay," he said; "if you'll pay now, I'll take off the kreuzers—I'll take off a florin and the kreuzers."

"Sit down and deduct the florin and the kreuzers from the bill now."

The landlord would gladly have raised objections, would have been very glad not to comply with this behest, but he did comply with it, and then inquired timidly:

"Will you pay now?"

"Not before I have spoken to the peasants. I shall come to the tavern on Sunday and speak to the peasants. What are you waiting for?"

This question was put with a degree of emphasis which induced mine host not to stop to answer it in well-chosen words, but to reply to it at once by deed, and lose no more time in doing so than was necessary to reach the door, which he closed behind him in cautious haste.

That evening he told his guest: "That fellow, since he's been on military duty, has assumed a manner like a corporal. Any one who had no courage might be afraid of him; and he's coming here on Sunday, to the tavern, and is going to talk with the peasants."

The guests—among whom were Anton and Barosch—contradicted the assertion that courage was needed in order not to be afraid of Pavel, and Barosch expressed the opinion that the boy might have the intention of speaking to the peasants, but would hardly carry it out. "Because," he said, striking his hollow chest with unwonted self-esteem, "because we do not care to be spoken to."

"Altogether," cried the landlord, "he presumes entirely too much of late."

"In what respect?" asked Anton, who had remained silent so far; to which mine host replied:

"And we ought to make things plain to him once more."

"What things?"

To this second question Anton no more received an answer than to the first; no one had any to give. In spite of this, however, all agreed with the landlord that "the boy presumed too much, and that 'things' ought to be made plain to him once more."

And then a small caricature of Rumor put a toy trumpet to its mouth, and flew about the village, going from house to house, and spread the intelligence that the child of the parish was coming to the tavern on Sunday, and would there call his foster-fathers to account, and they would give him his due; they had made up their minds to it; they were going to make "things" plain to him once more. What the mysterious "things" were, small Rumor did not betray, and thereby furnished the expected event with a peculiar charm.

On Sunday the tavern was filled to overflowing; but the burgomaster did not make his appearance and only the senior councilor was present, Peschek by name, an excellent man, who was quite energetic when he did not happen to be drowsy. Peter was accompanied by his numerous kindred. He looked badly, his clothes hung around him loosely, his voice was hoarse, and his breathing sounded like the noise of a saw in use.

On a stool in the dark corner beside the stove crouched Virgil. The old fellow's red face and his sparkling eyes fairly shone from out the shadow.

Adjoining the large guest-room there was a small room with one window, in which stood the table for the gentry. The doctor and the forester had seated themselves at the latter, and had left the only entrance, the door into the adjoining room, open, as they too were not without curiosity as to the things that might be about to happen. They winked at each other when the host glided in, gracefully turning out his feet, as he was wont to do whenever he entered the "gentry-room," and whispered: "Here he is."

Pavel entered the guest-room, and, to the surprise of all assembled, Arnost accompanied him. Had the two become good friends during the short time of their military service?—both, indeed, had acquired quite a military air. Holding himself very erect, and without lifting his hat, Pavel approached the table at which the peasants were seated. He carried in his hand a sheet of white paper which he slowly unfolded, went up to Peschek, held it before his eyes, and said:

"The landlord says the burgomaster and the peasants want me to pay this bill; is that true?"

No sound was heard in answer. Peschek had not looked up at all, and Pavel's voice was so suppressed by emotion that, in the confusion which reigned, the councilor could easily pretend not to have heard the question; he knocked on the table dreamily with his empty glass, and called upon mine host to fill it. Pavel waited till this had been done, and then repeated his question word for word. For the second time Peschek paid no heed to him, and now Pavel laid his hand upon the councilor's shoulder, and said firmly and menacingly: "Answer me!"

"Dog!" came from the other end of the table. It was Peter who had spoken, and in his immediate neighborhood there arose a murmur of approbation. Pavel, however, pressed harder on Peschek's shoulder than he was aware of or intended to.

"Must I pay, I ask you, I ask the peasants, I ask him over there," he cried, nodding at Peter.

"Yes, yes, yes," they all shouted at him, amid a torrent of oaths. Peschek writhed and twisted himself; his drowsiness had departed; he had not felt so wide awake in a long time, and hardly ever so clear-sighted.

"Let go of me," he said, looking up at Pavel, threateningly, while thinking inwardly: "The fellow is being wronged." "I cannot help you," he continued; "I could not if I wanted to. You will have to pay."

Pavel changed color and drew his hand away. "Very well," he said, bitterly, "very well, then."

Slowly, with a solemn gesture, he put his hand in his breast-pocket, pulled out a package, opened it deliberately, and took from it a ten-florin note, which, with the bill, he handed to the landlord, and said: "Receipt the bill and give me the change."

A pause of astonishment ensued; no one had expected *that;* malice and disappointment divided the sway over the minds of those present; the landlord alone was in raptures. Having put the bank-note in his pocket, he promptly placed a florin on the table before Pavel.

The latter took it, folded his arms, and cast a bold, challenging look over the whole company. "There!" he said; his voice was no longer veiled; it sounded loud and powerful, and with real enjoyment he let it ring out these words:

"And now I want to tell the council and the peasants that they are a set of miserable scalawags, the whole of them!"

A unanimous shout of indignation replied to this unheard-of insult, which the poorest, the lowest of the villagers had thrown in the face of the wealthy, "the powers that be." Those nearest to him fell upon him, and would have thrown him down, but for Arnost and Anton, who came to his aid. When, in the fearful tumult which ensued, the words: "Ungrateful wretch!" uttered by Peter, fell upon Pavel's ear, he reared up, and, with the motions of a swimmer, who divides with both arms the waves which are rushing upon him, warded off the crowd which was threatening him.

"Ungrateful?" he thundered, and through the indignation with which he was burning and quivering, there resounded a heart-moving plaint of long-endured pain: "Ungrateful? And for what should I be grateful to you? For every grain of corn you have given me I have paid with my work. My schooling I got from the master for nothing. I have never received a single article of clothing from you. The land on which my house stands you sold me for twice as much as you would have charged any one else. When the burgomaster died, you blamed me for his death; your children nearly stoned me, and when I was discharged as innocent, you still said: 'You're a poisoner, after all.' Now I have saved Peter's life, and because I pulled down the landlord's fence in doing so, I am made to pay the damages. Scalawags!" He threw the word in their faces a second time, like an enormous box on the ear, which was meant for all, and sufficed for all, and—whether it was the elementary power of the wrath which flashed from his eyes, or the half unconscious sense of the legitimacy of that wrath—in spite of the tumult which that word had called forth, Pavel was allowed to continue: "Why did you treat me thus? Because as a child I was a thief? How many of you are honest? Because my father died on the gallows? Could *I* help that? Scalawags!" And now rage overpowered him; bewildering his mind, calling for vengence, the memory of all that he had endured and that had never been atoned for rose up before him. He no longer found words for an accusation, he could only find them for a threat, and that he uttered: "But if I do something to-day that brings me to the gallows, too, it will be your fault."

Not what he had said, and what only a few had understood, but his clenched fists, the aggressive position which he had assumed, provoked those whom Pavel had reviled, and suddenly blows rained down upon him, without producing more effect than if they had fallen upon a rock. He struck but one blow in return, but entirely disabled him who received it for that day and presumably for several succeeding ones.

"Be quiet now!" cried the forester, whose stalwart figure had appeared in the door of the gentry-room. "You have told them your mind, now keep quiet."

"Keep quiet!" responded a hoarse echo. Peter had mounted on the table, and threw a beer-jug at Pavel's head, missed him, and struck Arnost's forehead with such force that he staggered; but he pulled himself together immediately, sprang at the treacherous assailant, and pulled him from the table.

This was the signal for a general combat.

Two factions were formed: Pavel's small, Peter's large. The landlord and Peschek took refuge with the doctor in the adjoining room. The forester, who had tried to act as peace-maker, was convinced of the futility of his efforts, made his way through the crowd, and left the house. Outside, a large crowd, composed mostly of women and children, had already assembled. The boys, intoxicated by the vicinity of a "big fight," yelled, jumped up at the windows, fought for the best places. The weaker ones among them, crowded away from the windows of the guest-room, went to that of the gentry-room, but suddenly dispersed, shrieking. Above them a pair of legs had made their appearance, and had attempted to use the heads of the boys as points of support, in order to reach the ground. The forester hastened to the spot, and rescued the owner of the legs—the doctor—from his hanging position.

"No longer any possibility of leaving in any other way," said the old gentleman, shaking his head; "and leave I must. That Holub is laying about him terribly. The fellow's a bear; no one would believe it who has n't seen it. Your most obedient."

In the same way as the doctor, Peschek, too, reached the street, followed by the landlord, who jingled loudly as he sprang to the ground. This sound was caused by the knives and forks which he had hurriedly taken from the tables and concealed in his loose clothes, before he left the guest-room to the wild troop, which was now holding sway there. He expressed his regret that he could not have taken the jugs and glasses as well, bewailed his probable lose, drove the boys from the window, pressed his face to the panes, and tried to distinguish what was going on in the room. But the terrible combat was being carried on in the dim light of the twilight, which was already falling, in the clouds of dust which it had raised. Nothing could be seen but a wild, closely-wedged tangle of human bodies, swaying to and fro, nothing be heard but groans and oaths and the stamping of heavy feet, the crash of breaking wood.

"Oh! my benches, my tables!" sighed mine host; and when he turned to ask Peschek whether it would not be better to send for the gendarme, the wary councilor had already disappeared in company with the doctor.

"Herr Forester, do you call them to order," cried the landlord; "I won't answer for anything—the blacksmith, Arnost, Holub—three against all the rest; they 'll be killed, and with *my* benches, *my* tables," he added, in a tone of utter despair.

"I don't think it will come to that," replied the forester, and suddenly there came flying out of the door two young peasants of Peter's kindred. They had not yet risen from the ground when a couple of their friends rolled out after them, and no less involuntarily than their predecessors. Three, and four, and five others next appeared, some turning a somerset, some with a short leap, this one with his feet first, another one with his head. And the forester greeted each arrival, and succeeded admirably,—aided by the persuasive arts of their female relatives,—in preventing those who were preparing to return to the battle-field, from carrying out their intention.

He found an unexpected ally in Barosch, who, by means of vigorous aid, appeared at the door, and behind whom several of the peasants of the older generation soon became visible. Barosch stopped on the upper step and, with great difficulty, stammered: "The wisest yields first."* He collected his thoughts, waved his hands about in the air, repeated: "The wisest yields first," and tumbled down the steps.

"That's right," cried the forester. "My respects to the wisest!" and when all who were wedged in the door had pushed their way out, he sprang up the steps, and, having reached the door of the guest-room, ejaculated: "Thunder and lightning!"

How the ranks had thinned. In the midst of the fragments of that which had been the furniture of the room, Peter and the few faithful allies who had adhered to him, were still holding the field against

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* German saying.

Pavel. The latter had divested himself of his jacket and stood, in his shirt-sleeves, in front of Arnost and the blacksmith; at his feet crouched Virgil, calling upon him for protection. Peter, beside himself, burning with fever, sought to incite his followers to a renewal of the attacks upon his opponents, which had evidently been repeatedly repulsed. They, however, hesitated, and when the forester shouted at them, in a voice of thunder: "Peace, let no one stir again!" they obeyed him, and Pavel, too, obeyed; but his face grew livid, and a mortal hatred flashed from his eyes as he fixed them upon Peter.

The calm was of short duration. What those two had to settle with each other could never be adjusted by the intervention of a third party.

"Dog! dog! dog!" screamed Peter, suddenly putting his hand in his trouser's-pocket. The click of an opening knife was heard, and he threw himself upon his antagonist with a naked blade. Arnost sprang forward to ward off the blow, but succeeded only partially; the stroke aimed at Pavel's breast, grazed his ribs; a large spot of blood discolored his shirt.

"Back!" he cried, "back! leave the fellow to me!" and a struggle began, like that between a man and a wild beast. Peter foamed, bit and scratched;

Pavel merely defended himself, merely held him off, gave himself time, gathering his strength for a decisive move.

And then it came. Guarding his face with his left hand, he quickly pushed the fingers of his right hand under Peter's leather belt, lifted him by it high into the air, held him thus with his outstretched arm, shook him, and panted: "Beast, if I dash you down now, it'll be all over with you!"

"Do it!" cried Arnost.

"Don't do it!" cried the forester, and Pavel suddenly felt his enemy's body grow heavy as lead; his clenched hands opened; the knife fell from them; his legs, which had been drawn up, sank down feebly—he was utterly exhausted, and awaited the finishing blow.

Then Pavel let him down slowly, saying: "Have you had enough? Get out now!" and threw him to his friends, who led the staggering, half-unconscious man from the room in silence.

The forester closed the door behind them, and Pavel broke out into a jubilant cry: "All of them outside and we inside!" He did not feel his wound, he did not feel the bruises with which he was covered; he felt nothing but triumphant joy, and an impetuous gratitude, eager for expression towards his allies: "All of them outside, and we inside; we three!"

"We four," whined Virgil; "didn't I stick to you to the last, Pavlicek, against my son-inlaw?"

Pavel continued to exult: "And I told them my mind, too!"

"Told it and showed it," cried Arnost, "and the next time they want to hear or see anything, you can count on me, comrade."

The forester looked Pavel over from head to foot: "You're a devil of a fellow!" he said, smiling. And Anton also smiled. A last struggle between his vanity and his integrity was ended:

"And it was he who repaired the machine," the blacksmith said.

CHAPTER XV.

PAVEL VISITS MILADA.

At midnight Pavel went home. It was cold, and the stars were shining brightly. Near the church he met Much, the watchman, who saluted him with a certain respectful cordiality, and said to him: "Our dogs have nearly killed a strange dog. Cursed beast, it fought like the devil."

"Another case of one against many," thought Pavel, and when he reached the village fountain, and stumbled over an object which lay upon the ground, he was glad when he heard it whine at his kick. He drew the dog from the pool of blood in which he lay, drew some water, and emptied a bucketful over the creature. As far as he could make out in the dark, the imprudent intruder had been used very badly. He was a cruelly used victim of that brute patriotism to which the blind attachment to everything domestic means blind hated to all that is foreign.

The dog gave no signs of life. Pavel left him lying where he had placed him, and went on his way. Soon, however, he noticed that the creature was creeping after him, slowly and painfully up the hill; he did not hinder him, put up with his company and, having reached home, attended to him in spite of the repugnance and disgust with which the poor beast's extraordinary ugliness and his gaping wounds inspired him.

The next day, as on every other winter's day, he went over to the factory. He found it difficult to work; his head felt dull, and his whole body ached. When he returned in the evening, he expected to find a summons from the burgomaster; but there was none, nor did he receive any subsequently.

During the time that followed, whenever he met one of his enemies, he expected an attack, and was prepared to defend himself. But each time in vain. Nobody seemed inclined to engage in a quarrel with him. Were they afraid of him? All of them together afraid of him alone? Or was it that they only intended to allay his suspicions, and were awaiting an opportunity to revenge themselves—could they be so mean and deceitful? At any rate, he would not cease for a moment to be on his guard,—would never forget that he was surrounded by creditors who had a bad debt to collect from him.

The winter passed, however, and no renewal of hostilities against him took place. He was allowed to occupy his cabin undisturbed; the sight of it, which had for so long a time given such dissatisfaction, was now met with indifference. Many were even secretly surprised at the air of competency which the little settlement gradually assumed.

Pavel had surrounded his house with a fence of withes set crosswise, behind which he cultivated vegetables. Everything prospered, thanks to his indefatigable, stubborn, iron industry. The small fir-tree, the only one which had withstood the attacks of the malevolent, had grown considerably; its top peeped in at the window at the side of the cabin. A sturdy little tree, which defiantly stretched forth its broad boughs, that, young as it was, were already decorated with a beard of white moss.

The whole establishment, the cabin with its slanting roof, the fir-tree beside it, the fence in front, looked like one of the pictures made by children in their first attempts at drawing. On the threshold, under which was buried the stone which was forever to remind Pavel of hatred and contempt for his fellow-men, lay the new member of his household, his snappish dog, whom, with unconscious humor, he had named "*L'amour.*" L'amour had the size of a setter and the frame of a butcher's dog; his broad nose was naturally cloven, which gave him a very fierce expression; on the slightest occasion he showed his teeth and bristled his short black hair. A bitter grudge against every living thing seemed constantly to be fermenting in his soul. He never engaged in any love-affair; all dogs, whether male or female, were equally obnoxious to him, and he made himself equally formidable to both sexes. He knew but one deep, quiet, undemonstrative attachment,—that to his master. For hours he would sit in front of the house without turning his eyes from the road along which Pavel would come. And when, at last, he discerned him, his inner feelings would be betrayed at the most by a few shivers of joy, which ran through him, and a faint wag of his stumpy tail. If L'amour gave few caresses, however, he also received few; but he always got his supper as soon as his master got home, and before the latter had eaten a mouthful.

From the unclouded peace of mind in which Pavel had been living for some months, he was roused by the arrival of a letter from his mother. He had not yet answered her last epistle, and now this letter came after an interval of a year, and contained neither a complaint nor a reproach; it merely repeated the requests with which the first one had been filled, requests for news of her children, and also closed, like that one and like all its predecessors, with the words: "I am well so far." Then followed the signature, and, finally, a communication which the writer had saved up to the last, and then banished to the uttermost margin of the paper, where it stood as if afraid and ashamed: "Fourteen months from to-day my term of punishment will be over."

This was on the evening of the sixth of March.

Pavel counted on his fingers. Next year, in May, then, his mother would come to live with him. His mother, the companion of a thief, a murderer, who, in court, to the terrible accusation of having been the accomplice of his crime, uttered not a syllable, not a sound in reply, made no denial whatever! Suddenly the thought flashed across him: "Like myself!" He, too, had made no denial before the court, nor had he excused himself. Because he could not have done so? No—because he did not wish to. Perhaps—unspeakably consoling, illuminating his whole soul, the feeling came over him: "Perhaps, she, too, could have done it and did not wish to."

That same day he wrote to his mother; but he was ashamed to confess to her that he knew nothing about Milada, and concluded not to send his letter until he should have procured for himself the possibility of giving some news of his sister in it, even if it were only the short, meager intelligence: "Milada is well; she sends her love to you."

The dawning day found him on the way to the city, and he reached the convent-door so early, that for a long time he did not venture to ring the bell.

He leaned against the wall of the great house, whose roof held that which was dearest to him on earth,—the only thing near and dear to him which had remained pure and undesecrated, the only thing to which his whole heart clung—the sister who had voluntarily turned away from him.

The bells of the convent-church rang for mass, the organ resounded in solemn tones, and singing was heard, as clear, as soft as the gently stirring air which bore it to him from a distance on trembling wings. From an earthly heaven, thought Pavel,—from a realm of the blessed and the peaceful, too high, too holy to be reached even by the longing of a sinful child of earth; too high, too holy to inspire him with anything but awe and adoration.

By degrees a small assembly of old persons and children had gathered about Pavel, permanent pensioners of the convent, who were waiting for admittance. When it was granted them, Pavel joined them as the last of the procession. The portress showed the poor people to a table on which a breakfast stood ready for them, and then addressed to Pavel, who had remained standing at the door, and did not stir, the question:

"What do you wish?"

And he, although he felt as if some one were taking him by the throat and strangling him, managed to bring out the words:

"My name is Pavel Holub."

A dark flush arose in the stern face of the portress.

"Oh, yes," she said; an unpleasant recollection of Pavel's first visit dawned within her.

"I am," he resumed, "the brother of little Milada."

"Oh, yes, yes,—and you would like to see your sister?" she added, without considering what she said.

No, he had never cherished so bold a hope as that. It was only at this question that it rose up within him, and drove the blood to his head with a force that almost made him dizzy.

"Would I like to?" he stammered, "certainly—more than I can tell."

The portress became aware of her blunder, and said, with some embarrassment:

"But there is no admittance at this hour, and altogether, this is no reception day, and—. But there is Mother Afra," she interrupted herself; "wait a few moments."

She went to meet an old nun, who, followed by two lay-sisters, was descending the stairs which led into the hall. Pavel recognized her at once; it was the Sister Stewardess, who had once spoken so important a word in the matter on which it seemed to him at that time that his whole salvation depended. The portress spoke to her in a low voice, and Pavel could not doubt that they were talking about him; Mother Afra's eyes were turned upon him repeatedly and with earnest attention while she was listening in silence.

At last she beckoned to him to come to her, asked with a melancholy smile, if he were really Pavel Holub, and when he assented, she said:

"That is hard to believe; you have changed so much. And what have you brought us that is good?"

Quickly, as it had arisen, Pavel's hope of meeting with his sister had died out again, and he did not even venture to confess that he had entertained it. In face of a room full of coarse, half-intoxicated men, he had proved himself their master; this old lady, in her serene dignity, with the mild benevolence in the features on which suffering had set its purifying stamp, intimidated him. In a suppressed and agitated tone, he answered:

"I have brought a greeting from my mother to my sister Milada, and I would like to know, besides," his voice grew almost inaudible, "how my sister is."

"That question we can answer, can we not, Sister Cornelia?" said Mother Afra, turning to the portress. "Your sister is well in body and soul, thanks be to God, who created her for our joy and edification. As for the greeting, we shall first have to obtain permission to deliver it; do you not think so, Sister Cornelia?"

Her eye rested kindly upon Pavel, while, still heavily oppressed, he said:

"I should also like to write to my mother, that my sister sends her her love."

"Oh, indeed," replied Mother Afra. "Well, that can be attended to, likewise—don't you think so, Sister Cornelia? You must only have a little patience. Have you time to be patient?" she added, facetiously, then nodded her head, and went on past Pavel, who made her a clumsy but profound bow.

He was taken by the portress to the same room in which, as a boy, he had passed hours never to be forgotten, hours of the most anxious expectation.

Nothing was changed in the dreary apartment, every chair was in the old place, the same damp spots were on the wall. Only the view from the grated windows offered a more pleasing picture now; for the fruit-trees, half denuded of their leaves at that time, were now gay in their spring-garment of white and pink blossoms. At the other end of the lawn, in front of the side-wing of the house, which touched the garden-wall, a merry party of little convent-pupils was busily engaged in play. They often interrupted their games, and vied with each other in running to the novice who had charge of them. And the latter had much to do to ward off the caresses of the assailing troop. And how kindly she did it, and how decidedly; how well she understood keeping the unruly ones in check, and encouraging those whom timidity held aloof, distributing reproof and praise, bestowing affection and manifesting displeasure according to merit and deserts. Pavel's eyes were fixed upon her charming, slender figure. He could not distinguish her features, but he imagined that her manner reminded him of Milada. Just about like that he fancied little Milada must look now, only she could hardly have grown so tall, that seemed impossible; impossible, too, that she should already be wearing a nun's habit.

A bell was heard; the novice took the smallest girl on her arm, the others ran along beside her or in front of her,—one moment, and they all disappeared in the house.

Pavel left the window. He had been prepared, by the words of Mother Afra, for a long time of waiting, and was greatly surprised when the door opened after only a few minutes. On the threshold, with her wonted lofty calm, unchanged by the years, which had left no trace upon her, appeared the Superior. She led a young girl by the hand, tall and slender, the same whom Pavel had been watching, and who had reminded him of his sister—Milada, in the habit of a novice.

He gazed at her in an astonishment which was at the same unspeakably happy and unspeakably sad; a cry of rapture came from her lips at the sight of him; the pallor of her delicate face grew still more transparent, still more colorless.

"Pavel, dear, dear Pavel!" she cried; but she did not tear herself away from the hand that was leading her; she stood still, and gazed at him with wide-open eyes, radiant with happiness.

He, too, stood still. Mightier than the wish to rush up to her and clasp her to his bosom, was the reverent awe which had come over him, and held him in check, and made the beloved one, whom he had so longed for, and who was so near him, unapproachable.

Benumbed by this feeling, he remained silent. In his head one thought chased another; this young saint, was that his sister? Had he still a right to call her so? Was it she, whom he had held in his arms a thousand times, had kissed, fondled, sometimes even beaten? Was it she, whose cries of "I'm hungry, Pavlicek, I'm hungry!" had enticed him to steal, oh, how often? Was it she, whose little feet he had often bound up when they were sore from the long tramps from place to place, with their father and mother? Was this she?

The Superior enjoyed the surprise of the brother and sister. "Well," she said, turning to Milada graciously, "who was it that once said, in childish despair: 'I shall never see you again; they will never let me see you again?' And now your brother is here. Speak to him now, shake hands with him."

This bidding had to be repeated before Pavel and Milada ventured to follow it, and then when Pavel held his sister's hand in his, he was startled at its feverish heat, and at the quick throbbing of the pulses which beat against his fingers. In his rough right hand he held a small, narrow one, but not the soft hand of one brought up in idleness, but a hand used to work. So the tender pilgrim on the way to Heaven had not been exempted from the common toil of earth.

The words which the master had once said to him, only half understood at the time, rose up in Pavel's memory. " How long can a candle burn that is lit at both end ?" His heart contracted, he raised his eyes from Milada's hand to her face, and said : " A nun then, so you are a nun ?"

The Superior replied : " Not yet, but in a little while she will be one of those who say with our Divine Redeemer : ' Who is my mother ? who are my brethren ?' "

At the word " mother," Pavel awakened as if from a dream. " Mother sends you her love," he said ; " she is quite well. And she would like to know how you are. What shall I write her ?"

" Write her," replied Milada, but stopped, turning a glance requesting permission upon the Superior ; and it was only when the latter nodded approvingly, that she resumed : " Tell her that my whole life is nothing but a single prayer for her, and—for still another, our poor, unhappy father," her voice had grown lower—now it rose again with a joyful ring—" and for you, too, my dear, beloved Pavel."

Pavel muttered something indistinctly, his eyes began to burn intolerably; suddenly he dropped Milada's hand and retreated a step.

She continued: "The All-merciful has listened to my prayer. He has made you good. Is it not so? Speak, dear Pavel, say yes—you may say so, for it is a work of His grace. Tell me, I beg of you, that you have grown good and honest. Pavel, dearest, are you good and honest?"

He bowed his head, deeply moved by her entreaties, and said: "I don't know."

"You don't know?" asked Milada, and when he remained silent, she appealed, with rising anxiety, to the Superior: "He does not know! Reverend Mother, how can that be?"

The Superior saw alarm and agitation depicted in the features of the novice, saw her pale cheeks colored by a deepening crimson, and replied, reassuringly: "It can very well be so. He has given you an excellent answer, that of a modest man, who does not know his own worth. We know it, however; we are aware of the progress which your brother is making on the road to salvation. It was for this reason that we allowed him to give you his message himself, and to receive yours in person. This has been done, and now, my dear children, you must take leave of each other."

Pavel sighed deeply: "Already?" And at the same time and with equal dismay the same words fell from Milada's lips. Only a short struggle, however, and the involuntary cry of the heart was followed by resignation to another's will; she said:

"Good-bye, Pavel."

Her pious obedience was rewarded. The Superior smiled kindly, and remarked: "And you may say: 'Till we meet again.'"

"When I take the veil," Milada interrupted her, with enthusiasm, "you must come to see me take the veil; any one can come. Is it not so, Reverend Mother? any one can come. He may come, and I," she added, humbly, after a moment's reflection, "may I ask him one question?"

"Ask it."

Milada, who had been on the point of following the Superior, turned to Pavel again:

"Dearest, have you forgiven all those who have injured you?"

He saw the intense, trembling expectation with which she listened for his answer; he examined his heart, and said "Some of them."

"But you must forgive them all; they are God's tools who lead you to Him by trials. Forgive them, love them; promise me."

She besought him with an impetuosity which reminded him of the Milada of former days. "Promise me, my Pavel! If you do not, I must suffer for it," she complained, "it is a sign that I have not yet done enough, in good works, and prayer and penance."

"I promise it," he cried, quite overpowered, and stretched out his arms towards her.

"Thanks," he heard her say; "thanks, dear, dearest Pavel!" And then all was over; the vision of light had vanished. The Superior had led Milada away; he was alone.

Soon after, the portress opened the door of the room, and remained standing beside it, with the knob in her hand. Pavel obeyed her mute behest, stepped into the hall, and then left the house.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MASTER'S LAST WORDS.

Pavel slowly crossed the square, which once had impressed him with such grandeur, but for the beauties of which he had no eyes to-day. The feeling of happiness at his unexpected meeting with Milada still vibrated within him for awhile, but soon gave way to an all-absorbing sensation of torturing anxiety, which filled his soul with sorrow and with regret.

He ought not to have suffered himself to be sent away, as he had done in cowardly timidity: he should have staid, and said to the Superior: "I feel anxious about my sister; do you not see that she is wearing herself out in work, and prayer, and penance?"—that would have been his duty, indeed, his right. The thought once conceived, at once became a resolve. Pavel returned to the convent and pulled the bell.

The door was not opened, but at a small grating in it an eye became visible; the portress asked the business of him who had rung the bell, and at Pavel's answer he was told that the Superior could not be seen. The shutter behind the grating was closed.

What was to be done? Should he knock, make a noise, force an entrance, at the peril of drawing the displeasure of the pious sisters upon himself? And if he did so—who would suffer for Pavel's fault—would suffer more voluntarily than by compulsion? Milada. He knew that very well, and commenced his homeward way anew.

At the end of the town, close by the bridge, there was an inn, and in front of it stood a linden-tree with spreading branches, giving shade to a few tables and benches, the thin legs of which were fixed in the ground. Pavel seated himself on one of the latter; he was hungry and thirsty, and called for beer and bread, but when that which he had ordered was brought, he forgot to eat and drink.

The scene in the court of the inn was quite animated; a country-stage had just arrived, and had deposited several passengers, two of whom were engaged in a lively dispute with the driver with regard to the gratuity demanded by him. One old woman missed some of her luggage, and to the annoyance of the other travelers, was overhauling the small mountain of valises and bundles which had been deposited under the portal.

Pavel at first took but little notice of these proceedings; but his attention was thoroughly roused when he suddenly discovered a valise, a fur coat, and a knotty stick, which lay upon the ground near the entrance. Why, these were three old acquaintances! Particularly the stick; *that* had danced about on his back very briskly on one occasion.

Without a moment's thought, he cried aloud: "Master, master! are you there?" sprang from his seat, and was about to rush into the house, when Habrecht came to meet him with outstretched arms.

"All ye good spirits! Pavel, my dear fellow!"

"Where did you come from? where are you going?"

"Where am I going? To you; I was going to see you, and now I meet you on the way. A happy accident—a good omen!"

"You were coming to see me? That is glorious, master!"

"Glorious? what nonsense! but don't call me master any more. I am no longer a schoolmaster; that is all over. I have become a disciple, and"—he pointed his lips and inhaled the air with profound satisfaction, as if he were speaking of something delicious,—"a new life is going to begin for me."

Pavel was astonished; he thought the new life had begun long ago.

"That was nothing, an utter failure," said Habrecht, shaking his head. "You shall hear all about it; come into the house; under this tree—a handsome tree—I may be longing for the sight of such a linden-tree soon; it is too cool for me. Come, my dear boy, I have a great deal to tell you and want to hear a great deal about you, before we part, probably, never to meet again."

He ordered dinner for himself and Pavel, as well as the best room on the first floor, and declared himself extremely well-satisfied when they were shown into an apartment, the furniture of which consisted of two beds heaped high with feather-beds and pillows, a table covered with oilcloth, and four chairs. The turbid soup, too, and the still more turbid wine, as well as the beef boiled to rags and the half-raw potatoes which the host set before them, he greeted with unconditional praise. His own want of nourishment was not greater than that of an Indian fakir, but he did not cease to encourage his guest: "Eat and drink, and enjoy your dinner; the food is good, and I will flavor it for you with improving conversation—with the quintessence of my experience."

He began his narration, became more and more excited, could not stay long in one spot, now talked while standing, now while sitting, now while darting about the room, and always with peculiar, abrupt gestures.

Yes, that had been a mistake,--that faith of his in a new sun of life, which was to rise for him in his new field of labor. The ghosts of the dead past hovered after him into the living present, and caused confusion and dissension where clearness and peace should have reigned. Habrecht had tried to do *too well*, had shown too much zeal, sought for favor too humbly; all this, combined with his industry, his strict attention to duty, and his blameless mode of life, awakened suspicion. "That man must have a guilty conscience," people said.

"Do you understand?" asked Habrecht. "When I heard that, the ghost grinned at me of which I spoke to you at first. Had I been like one who had nothing to make amends for, had I not wanted to do too well, but gone my straight way simply and plainly, without caring for the good opinion of strangers. Another thing! they are far more rabidly Czeckish* there than here; my German name displeased them; they suspected me of German sympathies—me, to whom this world is a place of trouble, and every human-being more or less heavily tried; *I* would be likely to make a difference; *I* would be likely to say: I care more for the welfare of him who was born on this side of the brook than for that of him who was born beyond it. There *is* a nation, yes, one which guides, which leads, which lights the way for us; all full of energy and ability, —*that* I should be proud to belong to—as far as all other pride of nationality is concerned,"—he put his hand to his head and laughed, "it is nothing but folly, unworthy of the century. That is my feeling. 'If you don't like my name of Habrecht,' I said to them, 'call me Mamprav, it's all the same to me.' Well, by showing my readiness to give up to them even in that matter, I lost ground with them entirely. Now I was a spy, who wanted to get into their good graces, for who knows what purpose, and then I trod on serpents at every step. At last I could not get a loaf at the baker's or an apple at the apple-woman's for my money. Oh, men, men! we ought to love you—and want to love you—but sometimes we are sorely afraid, indeed, we even are afraid very often."

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* About 1848 a movement sprang up in Bohemia and Moravia to re-instate the Czekh, or national language (a branch of the Slavic), and the opposition between the two factions representing that and the German was very bitter.

The memory of what he had lately passed through depressed him; he remained silent awhile, but ere long his indestructible vivacity regained the upper-hand and he again sent forth a torrent of speech, and forgot, carried away by it as he was, to consider the powers of perception of his listener. Pavel's interest in the explanations of his old patron had great difficulty in asserting itself in view of the defective comprehension which he could offer them.

The last trial which Herbecht had undergone, had been bitter, but short. A friend, an old schoolmate, with whom he had kept up a constant correspondence, presented himself to him one morning as a deliverer from all care and trouble. There was a certain resemblance between the destinies of the two men, and it was the extraordinary harmony between them in mind, character and feeling, which had preserved their friendship in spite of long years of separation. On meeting again, they resolved at once to continue their battle of life side by side. The means for repairing to the battle-field chosen by them, were to be furnished by the friend, by the friend's friends. The latter lived in America, were wealthy and highly respected, and belonged to the most zealous apostles of an "Ethical Society," the object of which was the propagation of moral culture, and which was daily gaining in adherents and in influence.

"They call themselves professors of a religion of morality," cried Habrecht; "*I* call them the kindlers and guardians of the most sacred fire that ever burned on earth, and the light of which is destined to call forth on the face of the human community the reflection of a lofty joy, hitherto a stranger to it. Their message has reached me in shape of a book, the like of which was never yet written. Oh, my dear boy! a wonderful book, which has almost taken the place in my affections of that which you, poor fool! once called a conjuring-book. I am going to follow the call; I am going over to seek for something which I have lost and have forever missed; a connection with the Beyond. We need one or two things, we poor children of earth, some degree of prosperity, be it ever so small, or a reason for our sufferings; otherwise we grow sad, and that is unworthy of a good man."

Here Pavel interrupted him for the first time: "Is sadness unworthy?

"Altogether. Sadness is quiet, is death; cheerfulness is activity, motion, life." He stopped in front of the table, looked at Pavel keenly, and said: "*You* are still wanting in cheerfulness; you have not grown more lively. And how are you getting along in the village?"

"Better," replied Pavel.

"I am glad to hear it. Since when?"

"Since I told them and showed them my mind one day."

"Told them your mind, oh!—showed it to them, oh, oh! How did you show it to them? Did you thrash them?"

"I thrashed them soundly."

"Well, well, well!" Habrecht looked rather dubious and folded his arms. "Hem, my dear fellow, blows are not bad, but only for the beginning, by no means later, and never again as a palliative. Quacks, indeed, know nothing about radical remedies, and therefore deny that there are such. Don't be a quack!" he shouted at the astonished Pavel, who had not even an approximate idea of what he meant.

And now Habrecht invited *him* to speak. "I have made you my general confession, now let me hear yours." He began to ask questions, demanded an accurate account of all that his former pupil had done and experienced, and received it as rapidly as the ejaculations, comments, and good advice with which he constantly interrupted Pavel, permitted. The latter did not object in the least; they disturbed him no more than the sound of a murmuring brook would have done, and gave him time to collect his thoughts after every sentence, and seek a suitable expression for them. At last he had poured out the whole of his firmly locked, overflowing heart into that of his whimsical friend.

They were both in a solemn mood. The old man laid his hands upon the head of the young one, and pronounced an earnest blessing upon him.

"In reason and as far as the parish is concerned," he concluded, "you ought to have turned out a bad fellow; and instead of that you are a fine one. Go on as you have begun, snap your fingers at them again and again. Work your way up to be a peasant; make them choose you for their burgomaster."

Pavel's eyes opened wider than ever before in his life, and looked at the master with a smile that was at the same time proud and incredulous.

"Yes, yes, and when you have reached that point, then repay them with good for all the evil they have done you."

It was growing dark; the hour of departure was at hand, and Habrecht was seized with feverish excitemet. He demanded his bill, paid it, gave no heed to the assurances of the landlord that he was much too early for the train, left the house, and, followed by Pavel, who carried his valise and his fur coat, started for the railroad-station in double-quick time.

When he reached the station and asked if he was in time for the night express for Vienna, everybody laughed at him, which calmed his anxiety.

A violent wind had arisen and shook the locust-trees planted in front of the station unmercifully; a cold, driving rain fell from the gray, scudding clouds. Habrecht paid no attention to it, and pitilessly exposed his venerable dress-coat, which he had donned for this journey, too, to the severity of the weather. It was only to his gray, long-napped high hat that he had granted the protection of a handkerchief spread over it and fastened beneath its brim, which curled up at the sides; and thus he sauntered up and down the platform beside Pavel, talking incessantly.

When the ticket-office had been opened, and he had bought his ticket, his impatience knew no bounds. He looked at his watch; he had no confidence in the station clock. Ten minutes yet, but it was possible that just to-day the train arrived five minutes earlier, and as, in that case, they might have to say good-by in five minutes, why not say it now? He begged Pavel earnestly to go home, not to wait any longer on his account. But before that, he compelled him, almost by main force, to accept of his watch.

"I shall not need it any longer; my friend has one. Reflect; if there were always one watch to two people, what an advantageous statistical proportion that would be! Farewell now, go!"

With one hand he pushed him away, with the other he held him back. "My last words, dear boy, mark them well, impress them on your soul and on your brain! Listen! we are living in an especially instructive time. Never has it been more distinctly enjoined upon mankind to be unselfish, if for no higher motive, still for that of self-preservation; but I see that that is too high for you again—I'll put it differently, then. In former times any one could quietly sit before his full plate and enjoy his meal, without feeling at all distressed that his neighbor's plate was empty. But that can't be done now-a-days, except by those who are totally blind spiritually. All others will have their appetites spoilt by the neighbor's empty plate—the good from a sense of right, the cowardly from fear. Therefore, do you have a care when you fill your own plate, that there are as few empty plates as possible in your neighborhood. Do you understand me?"

"I think I do."

"Do you understand, too, that you ought never to be any man's enemy, not even if he is yours?"

"My sister has told me something like that," replied Pavel.

Habrecht expressed his gratification at this harmony of ideas, and continued: "Furthermore, do not forget your reading. Before I gave away my stock of school-books, I laid aside six of them for you—you will receive them by mail—plain books, compiled by men who never became famous; but if you know everything that is in them, and do everything that they advise you to do, you will know much and will do well. Read them, read them constantly, and when you have finished the sixth, begin at the first again. As for the most difficult experience in life, the sweetest, the most cruel, the mightiest and most terrible of all passions—I do not even like to name it—I should think you might have been put out of conceit with it, and would probably remain so. It has been poisoned for you at the source, at its very beginning; that is sometimes effectual for all time. You have had so bad an experience with it, that your most sincere friend—whom I take myself to be—could wish you nothing better.

More and more people had assembled at the station. A bell sounded, a whistle was heard in the distance. Habrecht paid no heed to all this; he had seized Pavel by the coat, and was talking to him rapidly and earnestly:

"It is not necessary that every one should found a family; it is the greatest delusion that one ought to have children of one's own—there are children enough in the world—and the better a father is, the less satisfaction he will have from his children. Who is it that feels noble and unselfish enough to be entitled to think himself capable of being a good father? And your reputation, my dear boy, be careful of your reputation; you remember that certain slate, which ought to be clean—yours was very much scratched—scour it, brush it, strive onward—think each day: 'If I am not somewhat better to-day than I was yesterday, I am sure to be somewhat worse.'"

"Master," said Pavel, trying to attract his attention, when the second bell sounded; but, from under the corner of the handkerchief, which had become loosened from the hat-brim, and, moved by the wind, fluttered around Habrecht's face, the latter looked at him affectionately, and continued:

"Do not tell me: 'Those principles are too high for such as I; take them to those who have a high position; we are low-born, and a lower morality is good enough for us.' I tell you it is just the best morality which is the right one for you, you low-born ones; you are the most important of all! It is no longer possible to accomplish anything great without your aid—from you proceeds what will be the curse or the blessing of the future."

"Master, master, it is time!" cried Pavel, and Habrecht replied:

"Your time, yes, indeed—and whatever you make of it, will—"

"All aboard!" was shouted close to his ear, and he looked round, saw the train standing before him, uttered a cry of dismay: "Third class to Vienna!" rushed up to the car designated to him by the guard, and climbed into it with marvelous, though not very graceful rapidity.

Pavel hastened after him and handed his luggage into the over-filled compartment in which, amid many excuses, he had found a place. Another whistle, and the train began to move. For a short distance, Pavel, running very fast, could keep up with it.

"God bless you, master!" he shouted, and from amid smoke and clouds of steam came the answer:

"And you likewise, my dear boy. Amen, amen, amen!"

Late that evening, when Pavel reached home, he fed his dog, took a pickaxe, and dug up the stone which he had buried beneath the threshold of his house.

L'amour sat at one side, and, from his cross, half-closed eyes, he cast such looks of censure on his master's work, licked his nose so often, and assumed so contemptuous an expression, that Pavel could not help noticing his ill-humor.

"Have you any objections to my doing this?" he asked.

L'amour replied by showing his teeth scornfully.

Pavel, however, had taken up the stone, examined it, weighed it in his hand, and found it even smaller and lighter than he had thought it was.

"Here it is, look—take it," he said, holding it out to the dog, who, by his master's order, took it into his mouth and carried it after him.

Arrived at the fountain at which their first meeting had taken place, Pavel took the stone out of the dog's mouth and threw it into the water, in which it sank to the bottom with a loud gurgle.

L'amour expressed his disapprobation by a growl.

CHAPTER XVII.

PETER'S DEATH.

For some time past the Baroness had exchanged her apartments on the first floor of the great castle for others on the ground floor. She felt herself growing very old, the stairs were troublesome to her, and she no longer ascended them except on occasion of some special ceremony which made it necessary. As, for example, on the first of January, when, as lady of the manor, she received the congratulations of all her officials, who presented themselves in a body with their wives and such of their descendants as were of suitable age; or on Thursday in Holy Week, when, in accordance with a family-tradition, she held a modest imitation of the festival which takes place on that day at the "Hofburg" in Vienna, in the midst of imperial splendor.*

The usual life of the old lady passed in uniform, ever-increasing quiet. Her thoughts frequently turned upon her death, to which she looked forward without fear, and—in spite of various ailments and physical discomforts—without impatience. She had made all her last dispositions, and had left her estate of Soleschau to the convent at whose head stood her highly-venerated friend, and at which Milada had been educated, who, if it pleased God and His representatives on earth, might be destined to become the head of the institution which she had at one time entered as the poorest of its pupils. The needy of the parish were not forgotten in the excellent woman's will, and no less any of her servants. Last of all, she had thought of herself, and that with much detail, and the ceremonies which she wished to have observed at her funeral were fully particularized. The family vault, which was quite delapidated, and for the preservation of which she had, on principle, never done anything, was to receive her remains, and was then to be walled up, and its entrance covered with earth and sod. "The people who are lying there, will be glad to be excluded from the present world," was her opinion; but she decreed that the chapel which crowned the mound over the vault was to be kept in good condition, and constantly open, so that every one whose heart might prompt him to say a paternoster for the old lady of the manor in that sacred place, could follow this pious impulse.

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* The "Washing of the Pilgrims' feet."

The Baroness now frequently meditated as to which of the people, for whom she had done so much, would feel the desire to pray for her eternal rest, and accustomed herself to apply to every one with whom she talked the mental question whether he were one of those who would remember her, or belonged to those who would forget her. And even though the affirmation or negation of her suppositions on the subject did not determine her valuation of people, they certainly exerted a great influence upon it.

One morning, on the day succeeding Pavel's last visit to the convent, the Baroness was sitting, with her work, in the middle of a sofa, which could easily have accommodated half a dozen more persons of her breadth, behind a table quite as long and quite as unwieldy, the door of the room opened, and Matthias entered with the announcement:

"That Holub fellow is here again."

"Again? As far as I know he never comes here," said the old lady, and Matthias replied:

"Yes--but he's here now."

"Hem, hem, what does he want?"

"He wants to talk."

"To whom?"

"To your Grace."

"Show him in," ordered the Baroness, and soon Pavel's heavy boots were creaking on the waxed floors.

He wanted to go up to the Baroness and kiss her hand, as would have been proper; but the table blocked the way to the sofa, and to push it aside would, on the other hand, have been very improper. Pavel experienced a painful conflict of duties, dropped his hat in his embarrassment, and did not venture to pick it up.

The Baroness beckoned to him to come nearer, rose and bent over the table, and sought, as far as her increasing dimness of sight permitted, to convince herself by ocular demonstration that it was really Pavel Holub who stood before her. Then she sat down again, and asked what had brought him there.

He, meanwhile, had been looking alternately at her and at the various knit articles which lay before her, evidently awaiting the finishing-touch, and which were new and fresh-colored editions of the skirts, jackets, and caps worn by the village-children. Pleased by the sight, and touched by the industry of the frail old woman, he suddenly took courage and told his errand. It consisted of the request that her Grace would have the goodness to use her influence that Milada's service in the convent might be lightened, else she would go beyond her strength, and would die.

"Die! Milada die!" The old lady laughed, was indignant, ordered the impertinent blockhead who dared to think of such a thing, the unfeeling and cruel wretch who would let such a word pass his lips to leave the room, and as Pavel, in dismay, was about to obey, called him back again, and ordered him to explain to her how he had happened to go to the convent, and to see Milada. "But don't tell me any lies, like a gypsy, such as you are," she added, greatly excited.

Pavel made his report with the greatest brevity, but with an impress of truth which could have left only the most obdurate doubter unconvinced.

The Baroness bent her head lower and lower over her knitting, and repented her attacks against Pavel, particularly the last. Why had she called him a gypsy? Why thus reminded him of the wretched roving life which he had been forced to lead in his childhood, and at the same time of his father and mother, and reproached him with his misfortune? Fie, that she should thus have allowed herself to be carried away by her vexation at the lad, because he had expressed an unfounded apprehension concerning his sister. Judging from everything that the

Baroness had heard about him lately, Pavel deserved rather praise than blame. Had not Anton, whom she trusted fully, said to her: "Holub was a good-for-nothing at one time, but now he's doing very well?" Had not the forester given him the highest praise? had not even the curate, who had a decided prejudice against him, replied to her inquiry concerning him: "Nothing can be said against him?" And she had abused him! She, who was standing on the brink of the grave, who soon would no longer have the power of doing good to any one, had given pain to one who was sorely enough tried in any case!

"Holub," she suddenly said, "nothing is the matter with your sister. Nevertheless, to relieve your mind, and mine too, a little, I will drive over to the convent to-morrow. For I must confess that your imaginary fears have made quite an unpleasant impression upon me, and I want to get rid of it as soon as I can."

Pavel's face beamed with joy. "If your Grace," he said, "would convince yourself of Milada's looks, and, in case you are dissatisfied with them, would give orders that she should be better taken care of, and not allowed to exert herself beyond her strength, as she does, because she has taken it upon herself to pray those whose sins are *too* grievous out of purgatory—that would be a real kindness, and the good God would repay your Grace for it a thousandfold."

She smiled and said: "The Lord would have a good deal to do, if He had to redeem all the bills drawn on him by unauthorized treasurers."

"True, very true," replied Pavel, and then as he picked up his hat from the floor, he looked about the room, and recognized it as the same in which, on the day when he had stolen the peacock-feathers, he had his first audience at the castle. Involuntarily he cast a glance at the thin cord hanging from the ceiling, and saw that it was still firm, and that the gilded tub had not yet fallen down. Every particular of that occurrence came back to him. He remembered especially the great repugnance with which the Baroness had inspired him, and which was in such contrast to the high esteem which he entertained for her now.

What was it that had changed? Not she, she had remained the same; she did not even, to his eyes, seem older—an old woman then, an old woman now. It was he who was different, who was richer inwardly, and no longer blunted, incapable of revering anything because he could not recognize that it was worthy of reverence. He felt this with tolerable clearness, and would have liked to express it;

but he would also have liked to take his leave, now that his business was ended and his petition had been offered and received in the most favorable manner. Without a suspicion that it behooved him to wait until he was dismissed, he said: "I will not trouble your Grace any longer now; I can only say a thousand times: God reward your Grace, and when you die, I shall pray for you."

"Indeed!" She sat erect. "Will you really do that, and with all your heart?"

"With all my heart!"

"Pavel Holub," said the Baroness, in a very kind tone, "I am glad that you are going to pray for me. And now tell me: my field, the one on the edge of which your cabin stands, did you ever look at it closely? How large should you take it to be?"

"About fifteen metzes, not quite three hectares,"* replied Pavel, without hesitation.

"A poor field, is it not?"

"Yes, all those fields up there are poor. If I were the manager, I would never sow wheat there."

"And what then?"

"Oats or rye; and I would plant cherry-trees, a great many of them."

"Plant cherry-trees then," replied the Baroness, gravely and quickly; "the field is yours."

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* A hectare is equal to about 2½ acres.

"Mine? What is mine?"

"That field; I make you a present of it."

"For God's sake—me—that field." It seemed to him as if everything was swaying about, the floor beneath his feet, the walls, the sofa and the Baroness on the sofa. He stretched out his arms and sought for a point of support in the air. "That large, that beautiful, that good field!"

"Did you not just say that it was a poor field?"

"For your Grace, but not for me; for me it is good, too good. For God's sake," he repeated, "do you really give it to me, that field?"

The Baroness screwed up her eyes: "I'm sorry, Holub," she said, "that I can't see your face quite distinctly just now. This growing blind, my dear Holub," she added, with a slight sigh, "cheats one out of many a pleasure. Go now, and send the steward to me. I will make arrangements at once to have the gift made legally binding."

"Legally binding, your Grace. It is to be mine by law?" Pavel was utterly beside himself; his rapture overcame his timidity, he rushed at the table, pushed it aside, seized the old lady's hands and kissed them, and when she snatched them away with all the force which she could muster, he kissed the hem of her dress, her sleeves, and her shawl, and moaned and uttered sounds of joy and could not speak.

Courageous though the Baroness was, she was rather startled at this storm let loose; she scolded Pavel roundly, and declared that all things must come to an end, even demonstrations of gratitude, and that if he did not go for the steward at once, the gift should be null and void.

This brought him to himself. The next minute he was out in the court-yard. Outside the portal stood Slava, feeding the pigeons, who were so tame that they did not turn out for Pavel, so that he had to take care not to step on one of them. Slava bade him good morning, and he, forgetting entirely that it was his worst enemy who was speaking to him, replied:

"I have got a field; the Baroness has given me a field."

The enemy blushed to the roots of her hair: "That is good news," she said. "I am glad to hear it."

Now only he remembered to whom he was talking, and hastened away without a good-bye.

Full though his thoughts were of other, more important things, he could not help reflecting that that blush had been very becoming to Slava, that she was really a very pretty girl, and that it was not right of Providence to assign so black a soul a dwelling in so charming a body. Every unprejudiced person must be deceived thereby. Fortunately Pavel was not unprejudiced; he could not be misled by appearances. He knew this Slava, and whether her lips moved in speaking, or whether—with sweetness and gentleness playing around them—they rested one upon the other, he could not look at them without remembering the hour when they had opened to draw scorn and mockery upon him, with the cruel question: "Are you going to your father or to your mother?" "Forgive them all," Milada and Habrecht had said, and he, surely he was willing to do it; but is not he who is admonished to forgive, at the same time reminded of that which he has to forgive?

It was memory which formed the impassable gulf between him and those with whom his dearest ones adjured him to make peace.

The Baroness kept her word; a deed of her gift was executed in due form, and Pavel was an owner of real estate. The unheard-of good fortune which had fallen to him from the skies, did not, indeed, contribute to the decrease of his unpopularity. No one rejoiced at it for his sake; even Arnost, when Pavel told him the great news, made a wry face, and asked: "How did that happen?" The forester, too, as well as Anton, expressed, at first, more surprise than sympathy. As for the steward, he took the liberty of telling the Baroness frankly that she had unfortunately allowed herself to be carried too far by her generosity ; that the gift was far too valuable a one, and could not but excite in the villagers envy towards the recipient, and dissatisfaction with the noble giver.

The Baroness contented herself with taking cognizance of these expressions of disapprobation from her chief official ; but when the curate began to talk in the same strain, and spoke of noble, but entirely too spontaneous impulses on the part of the Baroness, she replied : " That her present to Pavel Holub was the fruit of a resolution taken by her a long time before, and that it was by no means too generous a gift, but one exactly suitable to a youth hitherto neglected by Fate, and who was, moreover, the brother of the future Superior of a convent-school for young ladies.

Upon this His Reverence was silent.

The Baroness returned from the convent, after a stay of several days, in very good spirits. She sent for Pavel, gave him countless greetings from his sister, relieved his anxiety about her, and spoke of her with boundless love and with boundless pride. The old lady grew quite excited in her enthusiasm about "the child." The good God Himself had sent her, the aged, weary pilgrim, this child, in order that it should brighten the last years of her life, and open the gates of Heaven to her!

"Make yourself worthy of such a sister," she enjoined upon Pavel, and he formed the best resolutions to strive towards this aim, which seemed to him the highest that could be imagined, but he could not rid himself of a secret doubt as to whether he would ever be able to reach it. He struggled manfully, however, and it was his fervent wish that the Baroness and his sister should hear nothing but good of him from henceforth. A great anxiety about his reputation began to take possession of him; a longing for praise, a pleasure in appreciation awoke within him, and he did not suspect that they made him weak as his defiance of mankind and his bold indifference to public opinion had made him strong.

"Who can say anything against me?" became his standing remark; one ill-natured look, one harsh word, were capable of offending him, who once was proof against the coarsest expressions of ill-will; the envy which his property aroused, and which in former days would have added to his pleasure in it, now spoilt it for him. His field robbed him of rest and sleep; it was a precious torment to him. Each time that he came back to it after a short absence, it had been damaged in some way, and in order to defend it, he could not muster the energy with which he had once defended his bricks. He did not wish the Baroness to hear that he had been fighting again, and, altogether, he preferred not to have her know to what degree the present which she had given him was being contested.

Once he found a part of the scanty wheat growing on his field mowed down while still green. The next night he watched for the offenders, who re-appeared, in fact, in the shape of several women and children armed with sickles. Pavel contented himself with taking their sickles and grass-cloths away from them, and carried these articles to the burgomaster the next morning. The latter expressed himself much pleased with this lawful and considerate proceeding, and promised to fine the delinquents, and make them pay the damages. Four weeks later, however, the sickles and grass-cloths were still lying at the burgomaster's, because the means were wanting to redeem them. Pavel finally himself requested that they should be returned to their owners, on condition that the latter should come to him and thank him.

This was done only too gladly; it was a new joke, and a capital one, to get off so cheaply, and then to go and thank Pavel, the child of the parish.

All those who had taken part in the fun, enjoyed it too well not to take an early opportunity of repeating the occasion for it.

The depredations continued, and Pavel still opposed very little resistance to them, while in other directions he developed a remarkable activity.

He would have liked to multiply himself, to be in ten places at once, and have a man at each place. He prepared a part of his field for the planting of cherry-trees; he helped the blacksmith whenever there was an occasion for it; the forester, in his improvements in the forest, consulted him in preference to all others, and expressed the opinion that forestry would have been Pavel's real calling, if he had been able to devote himself to it from his early youth up. "And what a capital blacksmith he would have made, if he had only been taught something," said Anton. "But parish-children are never taught anything; the rudiments are wanting, and it is too late now to begin from the beginning. He 'll toil and moil with his field as long as he lives, and it won't amount to anything, after all."

This prophecy grieved Pavel, but it could not shake his confidence in his field. He engaged old Virgil, who had given himself body and soul to his foster-son, as he called him, and sat on the threshold beside L'amour from morning till night, to keep watch over his land, and Virgil gladly accepted the office, but was no longer capable of discharging its duties. Trespass on trespass on Pavel's property was perpetrated before his very eyes. The reproaches to which Virgil had to listen in consequence, were received by him with a crafty, roguish smile, as he said:

"Pshaw, Pavlicek, what do you care for that rubbish? It won't be long before you can throw the whole of it at their feet; you 'll own very different land soon."

Pavel grew angry, reproved him for such talk, and turned away quickly to hide the impression which it made on him.

The old man became more and more sprightly, his faint flame of life seemed to flare up anew as the summer was waning. A miracle at which he rejoiced, was about to take place. He, the decrepit old man, was going to survive Peter, young and strong though he was. Yes, that was the only thing that gave him pleasure; he would survive Peter! The doctor made no secret of having given the latter up; every one knew it. Only Vinska would not believe it, and the invalid himself said:

"I shall get well as soon as I can get rid of this cough."

Peter fought with death like a giant; the nearer it drew to him, the more bravely he defended himself.

"It's all no good," his father-in-law confided to every one who would listen; "the first frost will carry him off; the doctor told me so," and old Virgil could hardly wait for the first frost to come.

Early one morning, in October, the sound of the passing bell was heard in the village. There was a knock at one of the windows of the pit-cabin, and L'amour barked. Pavel started from his sleep; the door of his bed-room had opened. There stood Virgil, his face a fiery red, his hands, wound round with a rosary, leaning on his stick; he said:

"What do you say, Pavlicek? Vinska is a widow."

CHAPTER XVIII.

PAVEL'S SACRIFICE.

The winter, this year, came in, from the very beginning, with an unusual degree of cold as well as with remarkable cleanliness. The snow, which, for a whole day and night, had drifted down from thick clouds in tiny, dense flakes, remained of a silvery whiteness as it lay on the ground ; smooth sleighing tracks were formed on the roads, and narrow glittering foot-paths ran from house to house, and along the edge of the fields. The most frequented of them all wound past Pavel's cabin ; it was the path trodden by the wood-cutters as they passed to and fro daily between the village and the manor-forest, where they were regularly employed at this season. When they went to their work in the morning, they would find Pavel well started at his ; and when, at evening, they passed on their homeward way, the indefatigable fellow seemed just to have arrived at the point when industry becomes a supreme enjoyment, a happy frenzy. They often stopped in front of his garden for a while, and exchanged a few words with him. On one occasion, Hanusch—the coarsest among the coarse—pretended not to be able to make out what sort of a thing it was that Pavel was working at.

"It is the frame of a roof," explained the latter.

"Indeed, are you going to build *another* pit-cabin?"

No, he intended to build a stable next spring.

"And what are you going to put into it?"

"You'll see," was the answer, and Hanusch laughed scornfully at Pavel's mystery, and cried, bending his square head to one side, and pointing to the others with the mouth-piece of his pipe:

"*They* will see; *I* know what it will be. Will you wager a pot of beer that I know it?"

The chuckling of the rest proved that they were initiated into the hidden meaning of their companion's assertion. Pavel, however, was but little troubled by this miserable chaffing, and, at the most, he sent after its originators, when they finally took their departure, a calm, "Go to the devil!"

On account of the wood-cutters it never would have occurred to him to execrate the path which led past his house; but he did execrate it for a much more substantial reason. Along this path came, at this time, once, even twice a week, pretty

Slava, as a messenger from the Baroness to the head-forester. The old gentleman had been ill, was gaining strength slowly, and, in order to assist the progress of his convalescence, the Baroness sent him, day after day, all manner of good things: old wine from her cellar, delicate saddles of venison, nourishing legs of mutton, and, for the most part, Slava was the bearer of these dainties. Pavel noticed with annoyance that she retarded her steps whenever she reached the neighborhood of his little garden, and mustered his establishment with looks of curiosity. What was there for her to look at? why need she trouble herself about his house and garden? She certainly could have no good intention in doing so. He took pleasure in nourishing his prejudice against her; among other things, he persuaded himself that she had been the leader of the children who had, at one time, trampled on his bricks. He had not, indeed, succeeded in taking her in the act, but that did not prove her innocence; it merely proved that she had managed to escape in time, faithlessly deserting, at the decisive moment, those whom she had led astray. As she had done by her accomplices, so, hundreds and hundreds of times, the associates of his boyish pranks had done by *him*: he knew what it was to be left in the lurch. Late in the day though it was, he would have liked nothing better than to obtain some satisfaction for the betrayed ones, even though it consisted of nothing but a severe reproof administered to the traitress. Generally, when Pavel saw Slava coming in the distance, he became so entirely absorbed in his occupation, that there seemed to be nothing sufficiently important to warrant interrupting him in it.

Once, however, he made an exception.

There she was coming along, the witch, with her basket on her arm, light of foot, and surrounded by a flood of sunshine; she wore a woolen kerchief tied about her face, which the cold air had tinged with red, a well-wadded and yet extremely dainty jacket, a full skirt, reaching to her ankles, blue, sprinkled over with tiny white stars, and high boots on her slender feet, beneath which the snow crackled. And she was so bright and cheery, that it would have been a pleasure to look at her, if one's heart had not been full of bitterness against her.

Arrived at the fence surrounding the pit-cabin, she slackened her pace, as was her wont, and looked at the house from the bottom to the top.

Suddenly Pavel rose up from his work, threw down his hoe, and approaching the girl, said:

"What are you looking at?"

And she, surprised, but not in the least alarmed, turned very red, and replied:

"What should I be looking at?"

"Nothing," answered Pavel, harshly; "you 're not to look at all, you 're to go on."

This, however, seemed by no means to be her intention; but, on the contrary, she had come nearer to the fence, and as Pavel, on his part, had done likewise, they stood quite close to each other. She, in all the confidence of her beauty, her youth, her happy disposition: he biased by his bitterness against her, against her deceptive grace and loveliness.

Slava had placed the basket on the ground beside her, and watched it constantly, as if she feared that it would run away the moment she took her eyes off it; and thus, with drooping lids and slightly trembling lips, she said:

"I look at the house, because I don't dare to look at you."

Pavel contracted his eyebrows, and muttered something about a "guilty conscience."

She colored again.

"Who has a guilty conscience?"

"The one who asks."

"I? Why should I have a guilty conscience?"

The feigned honesty with which this question was put roused Pavel's anger, and while a thousand burning expressions for it crowded to his lips, he clumsily blurted out the weakest, the most childish:

"Did you not trample on my bricks?"

The girl raised her eyes and fixed a full, clear glance upon him:

"When should I have done that? I never did that."

"Don't lie!" he said, peremptorily.

"I am not lying," she replied; "why should I lie? I did not do it, and that 's the whole of it."

He believed her, he could not do otherwise than believe her, and, already somewhat pacified, he continued:

"Did you not run after me with a stone in your hand?"

"But, Pavel, why should you remember such a thing as that, done by a foolish child? Think of all that *you* did in those days," she waved her hand in the air with a slight and graceful motion. "Such things had better be forgotten. Please, Pavel, forget it."

He was silent; he felt a kind of shame at his all too faithful memory. Was she not right? Such things had better be forgotten. Milada had spoken of forgiveness, even of gratitude to those through whom our trials come to us; but never of forgetting the offence. To tell him of that, the most radical of all curative remedies, it had needed this little good-for-nothing enemy.

She said a few more pleasant words, bent down, took up her basket, and went her way.

Pavel remained alone with L'amour, with his work, and his thoughts. Forget, and then you need not forgive! Forget, and then you will have no reason to be proud of having forgiven. If one could only do it! He remembered that he had done it once, in the case of his fair opponent, at the time when he came rushing out of the castle, full of happiness at the valuable present which he had just received from the Baroness, and if he had succeeded in it once, by accident and unintentionally, could he not do so again, voluntarily and after due reflection?

On her next expedition to the forester's house Slava again made a short stop at Pavel's house, and his first question to her was:

"If you had no guilty conscience as far as I am concerned, why were you afraid to look at me?"

"Because you were always so cross, and made such dreadful eyes at me. I don't like that; I like people to be cheerful and look at me kindly."

By "people," she did not by any means intend to designate him alone; she meant every one. Pavel was not long in doubt about that. There was a little imp of merriment within her, that impelled her to wage war with gravity wherever she came in contact with it; and it was this merriment, which could sometimes almost reach the bounds of romping gayety, together with the high honor in which she held her dainty little person, and her modest, maidenly ways, which constituted the charm which she exercised over young and old.

There was no one, however, upon whom it acted more irresistibly than upon Arnost; she had fairly ensnared him, and he did not conceal from Pavel either the torments of his love or his jealousy of him. Reasonable fellow that he was, and endowed with much practical good sense, he found nothing more natural than that Slava should prefer the owner of a house and of a field to him, who possessed merely a house and the small plot of parish land belonging to it.

That Pavel intended to enter the ranks of the competitors for the favor or the hand of the pretty girl, seemed to Arnost such a matter of course, that he did not even ask him about it; and his friend, to whom he intimated something of the kind, and who had been about to say: "You are a fool; I'm not thinking of her; she is perfectly indifferent to me," left the words unspoken, for—he did not wish to tell a lie.

She was not indifferent to him; she had bewitched him, too. Not as she had Arnost; there was no question of being blindly in love in his case, but his heart grew warm in her presence, and she pleased him exceedingly, and he would have been only too glad if he could have gotten rid of the doubt which presented itself again and again to his mind when he was with her, and a certain anxious, indefinite expectation: "Now she's going to do something that will strike at my heart, and spoil my pleasure in her."

Another doubt, which had formerly troubled him sorely, had left him entirely, it was this: "Will a decent girl be willing to take me? will a decent girl be willing to live under one roof with my mother?" Well, Slava was a decent girl, and let him see pretty plainly that she would take him, although she knew very well that his mother might return any day and find a home with her son. She asked after her from time to time, and on one occasion remarked:

"A mother is always a mother; if we only have one, it's no matter how she is. I have no mother."

Pavel now invariably greeted her very courteously, never "made dreadful eyes" at her any more, but, however inwardly agitated he was, maintained the utmost reserve towards the girl; while Arnost, in her presence, almost melted away in tenderness, or flared up in flames. The ardent lover was always exceedingly well informed of all her movements, and it invariably proved to be the case that on the days when she had to take a message to the forester's house, he "just happened to have nothing to do," and could place himself at Pavel's disposal to help him with his work. When she whom they expected arrived, she found the two leaning on the fence and awaiting her. Which of them did so with greater longing, whether it was the grave, reticent one, or the other, she herself did not know. She was equally cordial, equally friendly towards both, but talked more with Arnost, because he was more given to chaffing and joking.

After Christmas Slava one day brought from the castle a piece of intelligence by which Pavel's anxiety about his sister, which had been lulled to sleep, was rudely awakened. Milada had been ill; the Baroness had lately paid a visit to the convent, and had returned home relieved in mind. Milada was better, was quite well again, she assured Pavel. Nevertheless, she had not found it easy to part from "her child," expected soon to return to her, and would then spend several weeks at the convent as the guest of the Superior. Before that, however—she sent word to Pavel—she wished to speak to him.

He hastened so avail himself of the permission, found the old lady depressed and anxious, and exerting herself the more, the more she felt so, to win peace for herself, and not disturb that of others.

The Baroness promised Pavel to obtain for him, immediately upon her arrival in town, an interview with his sister, and demanded of him, in return, the promise that he would not take any steps on his own account towards securing one.

He wrote to Milada, received a few sweet comforting words in reply, waited for the departure of the Baroness, and, when that took place, for the summons to his sister. His heart was heavy to bursting, and only grew somewhat lighter when he was permitted to refresh himself by the sight of the lovely girl to whom he and Arnost had given the name of "the Oriole."

The time came when he began to think it foolish to struggle any longer against the attachment which was taking possession of his heart. He did not flatter himself that Slava loved him deeply ; but he did not doubt, on the other hand, that if both he and Arnost wooed her, she would give *him* the preference, and, once married, would be as good a wife as she had been a good girl. The thought of giving up all claim to her from consideration for his friend, had, in the beginning, crossed his mind repeatedly ; but these impulses of generosity had decreased in frequency in proportion as his liking for the pretty creature grew stronger.

Towards Arnost he was as frank as the latter was to him.

"Much as you love her," said Arnost, "I love her more."

"What good does that do, if she takes me," was Pavel's reply. "And I am going to ask her soon; I want to be happy, too, for once."

"Ask her," Arnost answered. "Ask her." His mind was made up. On the day on which Slava accepted Pavel, he would sell the cabin in which he had lived alone since his mother's death, and become a soldier. A military life is not a bad one, particularly for one who, like Arnost, had received a commission after two months of service.

One foggy January morning he came to Pavel in the greatest excitement and informed him that Slava would make her last visit to the head-forester that day, that the latter was well again, and no more dainties would be sent to him from the castle.

Cold sweat stood on Arnost's forehead; his heart beat wildly. "I can't stand it any longer," he said. "To-day either you must speak, or I."

"Speak then," replied Pavel; "but I shall speak, too."

They looked at each other with eyes flashing with hatred, and paced to and fro behind the fence like two caged lions. L'amour sat on the threshold, black and ugly, and observed with silent contempt the two sons of men whom passion was consuming.

Just then a ray of sunshine penetrated the white mist which lay upon the fields and roads, and turned it into a glistening, rainbow-colored vapor, wrapped in the transparent folds of which little Slava was seen approaching. And on this day, just on this day, when the hostile friends desired to speak a word with her in confidence, she was not alone.

She had brought a companion with her—Vinska.

Arnost and Pavel discovered this at the same time, and the first cried and the second muttered: "Confound it!"

A short distance behind Vinska and the young girl came the band of wood-cutters. They were unusually late in going to their work, because the day before had been Sunday, and because a wood-cutter who has any respect for himself always "quits work Monday morning," as Hanusch was wont to say.

Vinska seemed to think it necessary to explain her presence by the fact that she was obliged to see the head-forester about the purchase of some timber, and had joined Slava because it was always pleasanter to walk in company.

Arnost took up the idea at once, and agreed with her, and, staring at her companion, stammered some confused words about the folly of not recognizing that, but preferring to travel on alone through life, rather than in the company of some one who loves us better than anything else in the world.

Pavel whispered to him angrily: "Speak, if you dare!" and when his first annoyance at Vinska's presence had passed away, he invited her and Slava to enter his house and rest awhile. At the same time he opened the gate, and, when they had entered the garden, bade them welcome, not without a certain dignity as the master of the house.

This act of courtesy was performed in sight of the approaching wood-cutters, and gave the coarse fellows occasion for comments of the most outrageous kind.

Pavel could find no answer to these, and, with suppressed rage, shouted to the wood-cutters, without moving from the spot: "Begone!"

They replied with coarse gibes, worse than any which had preceded them, and Hanusch, leaning against the fence lazily, with his pipe between his teeth, pretended to be looking attentively at the roof-frame which was lying in the garden, and said:

"That's finished now, so you can begin to build the stable. Go on, and build it, and hurry with it;

she whom you are going to put into it is on her way home now, she from the State's prison!"

"She, yes—she!" the chorus fell in, and Hanusch roared, so that the veins in his neck were swollen almost to bursting.

"You might as well take him, you women! You need n't be afraid of the mother-in-law from State's prison; she'll be put in the stable, the mother will!"

He repented of his words.

Pavel had risen to his full height; from his breast there issued a horrible groan, his lips were covered with blood from the lip which he had bitten through. For one moment he glared. There stood the woman whom he had loved—there stood the girl whom he loved now. There the honest fellow with whom he was contending for her, and there by the fence the scoundrel who had offered him in her presence an insult which could never be wiped out; and on the ground, at his feet, lay his good carpenter's axe. The duration of a flash of lightning, and he had seized it and thrown it. Hanusch uttered a shriek, and cast himself to one side. The axe, which had been aimed at his head, flew past him within a hair's-breadth of his ear. All screamed. Pavel pushed Vinska aside, who tried to intercept him, sprang over the fence, and into the midst of the wood-cutters.

He looked so terrible, so boundless a fury flashed from his eyes, that the whole band retreated before him; Hanusch, with his hand at his ear, farthest of all. But the next moment he had been reached and brought to bay by one who was even quicker than Pavel. L'amour had uttered an ominous growl, thrown himself in front of his master, and seized Hanusch by the throat. The latter slipped, reeled, and fell to the ground just in front of Pavel, his protruding eyes fixed upon him in despairing terror. Pavel had already raised his foot, to crush the mouth which had thus dishonored him. Suddenly, however, as if seized with a loathing and horror, and pale as death, he stamped on the ground, and cried: "Back, L'amour!"

Very reluctantly the dog loosed his prey. Hanusch rose with difficulty, his companions seemed about to attack Pavel in a body, but changed their minds. They parleyed for awhile with Arnost, while Pavel stood at one side, brooding gloomily, and finally, having grown somewhat crest-fallen, they went their way.

Those who remained behind formed a small, silent group. Pavel seemed to have no inclination to speak first. He had gone to the door of the cabin, and was looking down at his dog, who returned his glance gravely and sympathetically.

Some time passed before Slava mustered the courage to remind Pavel of the invitation given a while ago. He renewed it in a low tone, and gave the girl—whose face still bore the traces of the fright she had undergone—a sad, constrained smile. They went into the house, and into the sitting-room with the low ceiling, the small windows, and the floor of trodden clay, which had been furnished by Habrecht's generosity. The table stood in the middle of the room, as it had stood in the master's room, the old easy-chair and three other chairs were placed around it. In the corner, opposite the fire-place, stood the narrow book-case, which contained the sacred treasure of the house, Pavel's most precious legacy, the books, in which Habrecht had enjoined upon his pupil to read constantly. And not in vain; the modest volumes showed distinctly that they were often handled, even though with careful reverence.

Vinska seated herself in the arm-chair; Slava took the chair beside her. The former was silent; the latter made some complimentary remarks about the neatness which pervaded the house, but soon ceased, disconcerted by the grave looks of the other three.

Arnost had approached Pavel, and had whispered a few words to him; but Pavel shook his head, had not stirred since, and stood as if rooted to the spot, wrapped in gloomy thoughts.

For a long time Arnost controlled himself, but finally his impatience conquered; he seized Pavel by the shoulder, and said:

"What are you fretting about? Stop that now. What do you care for the talk of those drunken fellows?"

"Yes," Slava joined in, with her clear voice, "what do you care for that? Let people say what they want to, and let us talk about something cheerful?"

Pavel listened—so sweet a voice, and yet it could awaken a discord.

"About something cheerful? Very well, that's just what I've been thinking, too."

He laughed a dry and bitter laugh, came to the table, and turned to Slava:

"I have something to say for him," he said, "for Arnost. We agreed long ago that I should ask you if you would marry him?"

"Don't make any bad jokes," cried Arnost, roughly; "what do you mean by that?" and Pavel retorted, still more roughly:

"Don't you want to court her any longer? Has your love come to an end already?"

"Oh, as far as love is concerned—"

The tone in which these words were spoken settled the question beyond a doubt.

A quarter of an hour later an affianced couple left Pavel's cabin; the lover in transports, the girl quietly content. She liked Arnost better than Pavel, but she would have liked him still better if he had been the possessor of Pavel's field.

Vinska left with the lovers, with whom she was going to the forester's. At the gate she let the young people go on, stopped, and said to Pavel:

"What does this mean? It has been said that *you* liked Slava?"

"I do like her," he cried, and his self-control was at an end; "but how can I marry; how can I take a wife, I, to whom it may happen any day, before I know it, that I have to kill some one, because I cannot help myself in any other way! I was made to live in shame; that's what I was born for. But they wanted to make something better of me,—the master and my sister Milada,—and now I've lost my liking for shame, and I can't stand it any longer; that is my misfortune."

After a pause, during which Vinska kept her eyes firmly fixed on the ground, she said: "You went to the grave with my poor Peter. I have not been able to thank you yet, because you always avoided me."

He shrugged his shoulders and said: "I shall not avoid you any more. Farewell."

"Dear Pavel," she began again, after another pause: "Before I go, I must tell you something. I have no peace; people do not let me have any peace. My poor Peter has been dead only three months, and yet I have had two offers of marriage."

"Accept one of them, then."

"I think," said Vinska, after having looked down at the snow for a while, "that I shall remain a widow."

"Remain a widow, then. Farewell."

She was about to go on, but turned to him once more, and began anew, in a depressed voice: "It is easy for you to say 'Farewell,' but when one has done any one such wrong as I have done you, one can't fare very well."

"You need not trouble yourself about that," he said, calmly. "I have forgotten all about it long ago."

She bowed her head, an expression of pain hovered around her lips. "And you," she asked, "are you really going to remain unmarried?"

"Yes," he replied. "I shall remain the lonely man whom you all have made of me."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE MOTHER'S RETURN.

The intelligence which Pavel expected to receive from town reached him, but proved very unsatisfactory. The Baroness sent him word that he could not yet be allowed to visit his sister; the reason would be given him later, and in the meantime he must be patient.

Soon after, he received a letter from Milada, in which she begged Pavel to defer his coming. In the most affectionate manner she thanked him in advance for fulfilling her request, expressed the hope of being able to see him in the Spring, assured him that she was improving daily, and closed with the intelligence that her taking of the veil, to which she was looking forward with unspeakable joy, would occur in May.

So Pavel had to wait patiently, and tried to do so; but it was not easy for him. At least once a week he went to the castle and asked: "Has her Grace come back?" and the answer was invariably: "No!" "Has she not written either?" "Yes, but only to give orders, which shows that she has postponed her return again."

She had expressed her approbation of Slava's intended marriage, of which the girl had notified her, as in duty bound, and had sent her the dismissal asked for, as well as a present in money, which sufficed not only to defray the expenses of the wedding, but also to lay by a snug little sum for the household. She did all this, because Slava, though an orphan and dependent upon herself from her earliest youth, had always conducted herself well, and could now go to the altar with an untarnished reputation.

On the third Sunday after Easter the wedding took place. Pavel acted as groomsman. He made up his mind to do so very reluctantly, but finally filled the position with dignity, and with pride in his self-conquest. Anton the blacksmith represented the father of the bride; Vinska the mother. In spite of the great widow's shawl which she had drawn over her head, the latter was handsomer than the bride herself. The curate addressed the bridal couple with unusual warmth, and honored them by his presence at the wedding-dinner at the inn. The doctor, the steward, the forester, the burgomaster, and some of the richest peasants all came to bring their congratulations, and receive the thanks of the young couple for the presents they had sent them. The affair went off without any indecent tumult, and, though simple, was " thoroughly genteel."

After dinner, there was dancing, and then something amazing happened. Virgil, who for four years past had been able only to creep along, led out an old serving-woman of about his own age, and the two started a redowatchka. When the band, at his bidding, struck up the music of that dance, long since out of fashion, the faces of all the old people present began to beam. The men rose, each one beckoned to " his old woman," they took hold of each other's horny hands, and swung in the dance behind the herdsman and his gray-haired partner. Once more they met in cheerful harmony, these old couples, who perhaps for a long time past had known nothing but wrangling or indifference. Around the faded lips of many of a woman among them there played a coy smile, the dim eye of many a man flashed boldy once again. The beloved redowa reminded them of the days when they were young, and they danced it through to the end amid the applause of their children and grandchildren.

Many a pretty girl had smiled at Pavel, and said: " What 's the matter with you, can't you dance ?"

"I don't know," he would answer, "I never tried."

"Try now, then."

But he would not do that; nothing in the world could induce him to make himself ridiculous here, before so large an assembly; he remained firm, and even withstood the entreaties of Slava, who insisted on his dancing with her at least once, on this her day of honor.

His example in renunciation was followed by Vinska. She even threatened to leave the company when the most impetuous of her suitors tried to force her to take the floor with him. Pavel and she occasionally exchanged a few words; he, if not in friendship, yet in peace; she, with deep gratitude, that he had done more than forgive her, that he had forgotten.

And so it was; with his love for her, the memory of the suffering which he had experienced through her had died out. And if, he said to himself, he had succeeded in conquering this first love,—which had rooted in his innermost being, and had grown and strengthened with him,—ought it not to be an easy matter for him to gain the victory over the second, which had blossomed on his tree of life over night? A few painful emotions would still have to be overcome, and then he would be a free man—for all time, if it be the will of God—lonely and free. And to his enjoyment of this freedom everything contributed on this occasion. The day was a day of honor not only for Arnost and Slava, but for him as well. For the first time Pavel was under one roof with those whom he most highly esteemed, on equal terms with them. The most important of the peasants greeted him cordially, the forester talked to him for a long time with paternal kindness, the curate asked his opinion on an agricultural question, the blacksmith insisted on making public the story of the steam-motor, and could only be deterred from doing so from consideration for Vinska. Arnost assured him loudly and enthusiastically of his gratitude and eternal friendship.

The child of the parish moved in an atmosphere of esteem and good-will, which he absorbed through every pore, and enjoyed the more deeply, because of the faint voice within him that said: "Make the most of this hour, you may never have another like it." There will be an end to the esteem, to the goodwill, when his mother comes. And she may come to-morrow—who knows? she may have come already. He may find her, when he goes home, in his room, by his fireside.

And suddenly, in the midst of his troubled happiness, there came over him an irresistible impulse: "Away! Leave your cabin and your field to your mother, and go away, far, far out into the world, among strangers, before whom you need feel no shame in learning. Learn, achieve, and grow to be —even though later than others—*more* than others."

These thoughts clung to him, accompanied him to his home, were his last before he fell asleep, and his first when he awoke.

But in the morning, when he went to look at the cherry-trees which he had planted in the autumn, and saw how the greater part of them had already begun to put forth blossoms upon blossoms, and when he walked around his field, on which the first grain sowed by him was coming up finely, he felt that it would be hard to part, after all. If Milada, if Habrecht, could have known the thoughts of flight which he had harbored, what would they say?

"My boy, even in your small sphere you can work silently and in secret for the general good."

This was one of the many sayings of his friend, the master, which, at the moment when they were uttered, fell upon Pavel's comprehension like the seed of the gospel upon the rock. Now, however, his soul no longer resembled the stony places, but the good ground, and the seed sprouted and sprang up, and with it a multitude of thoughts.

A voice, calling his name, suddenly roused Pavel from his reflections; a stable-boy from the castle came running towards him, beckoned to him from a distance, and cried:

"Our lady has sent a messenger to tell you to come to her in town at once; you 're to ride."

"Why, I can walk," replied Pavel, whom surprise, joy and alarm caused to turn first hot and then cold; "why should I ride?"

"So as to get there more quickly, probably; but hurry, they are harnessing the horses."

Pavel changed his clothes hastily, and ran to the castle. A light wagon with a pair of strong farm-horses was waiting for him, and he soon reached the city and the door of the convent, where the portress received him with the words:

"I have orders to conduct you to the Baroness."

"Is my sister with her? How is my sister?" asked Pavel, breathlessly.

The nun did not answer, but went on before him up a flight of stairs, along a passage decorated with paintings, at the end of which, opposite a double door, there was an image of the crucified Christ as large as life.

"How is my sister?" repeated Pavel.

The portress pointed to the head of the Redeemer, with its crown of thorns, and said:

"Think of His sufferings." Then she opened the door and bade him enter. Pavel obeyed, and found himself in a solemn, hall-like apartment, in which stood the Baroness and the Mother Superior, the old lady leaning on the arm of her friend.

"God's greeting to you," said the Reverend Mother; the Baroness tried to speak, but could not, and burst into tears.

Pavel, too, could only stammer: "For God's sake, for God's sake, what about my sister? is she ill?"

"She is well," said the Superior. "She has entered into eternal rest."

Pavel stared at her with a look of anguish and of wrath, before which her beautiful calm eyes fell.

"What does this mean?" he cried aloud in his agony.

At this the little old lady dropped the arm of her strong friend, and tottered towards Pavel with outstretched, trembling hands.

"Poor boy," she sobbed, "your sister is dead; my darling child has gone on before me, poor weary old woman that I am!"

Her knees failed her, she was on the point of falling; Pavel caught her, and the poor old lady wept upon his bosom.

He led her carefully to a chair, and helped her seat herself in it; then, trembling all over, he turned to the Superior: "Why did my sister write me that she was improving daily?"

"She believed it, and we allowed her to believe it until the time came to prepare her for the extreme unction—" she hesitated.

"Prepare her?" repeated Pavel, and pressed his hand to his dry, burning eyes. "So she knew that she was going to die?"

The Superior made a sign of assent.

"And did she not say that she wanted to see me; did she not say: 'I want to see my brother once more?' Dear lady," he addressed the Baroness, raising his voice, "did she not say: 'I want to see my brother once more?'"

"She sent you a thousand greetings and blessings, but she did not ask to see you," was the answer; and the Reverend Mother added:

"She had done with everying earthly, she already belonged to Heaven. She had a glimpse of it in her last hour, saw God in His glory, and heard the jubilant songs of the angelic choir, who welcomed her to the realms of the blest."

"When did she die?" asked Pavel, with half-choked utterance.

"Last evening."

Last evening,—while he was in the midst of gayety, while his thoughts were so far from her! A wild doubt seized him. "It cannot be, it is impossible!" And he cried: "Where is she? Take me to her!"

"She has not yet been put upon the bier," replied the Superior. But Pavel would listen to no objections, and she who was wont to command, to rule, yielded to him.

They ascended the stairs to the second floor, and went along a passage upon which many doors opened. At one of these the Superior stopped.

"Maria's room," she said, deeply agitated.

Pavel rushed forward and tore the door open. In the white-washed cell with the grated window and the bare walls, into which the sun was streaming, there stood a narrow bed; a wax-taper in a black iron candlestick was burning at its head, another at its feet, and beside it knelt two nuns, absorbed in prayer. On the bed lay, covered with a sheet, a slender, rigid corpse. The Superior approached it, and drew the sheet from the face.

Pavel started back, reeled, and fell against the door-post, where he remained standing, and writhed like one undergoing torture. At last, at last tears burst from his eyes, and he cried: "That is not my Milada! this was never she. Where is my Milada?"

He was not to be quieted, his grief mocked at all consolation.

The Baroness sent for him, wept, spoke of

Milada, and he could not find it in his heart to say to her, what he was thinking incessantly: "If she had been taken from the convent at the right time, she would be alive now; you would have your child still, and I my shining example, my most precious treasure!"

At the wish of the old lady he remained in town till the day of the funeral, wandered about the streets, and was made powerless against his grief by his enforced idleness.

"Milada, my darling sister," he would say to himself, and sometimes he stopped short, and it seemed to him as if some one must come after him and say to him: "Turn back, she is alive, she is asking for you. That little shriveled dead face that you have seen was not Milada's."

When she lay in state in the chapel, in the light of a hundred wax-tapers, dressed in white, and covered with white roses, he could not be induced to approach the catafalque. It was only when the coffin was closed which held the remains of his Milada, that he threw himself upon it, and prayed, not for her, but to her.

At the funeral the grief of his old friend, the Baroness, made him almost insensible to his own. Utterly broken-hearted, she stood beside him at the grave of her darling, in the quiet convent cemetery, and when the ceremony was concluded, allowed the procession of nuns to pass by her without joining it. It was only after a while that she said to Pavel:

"Take me to my room now, and then go home and tell them at the castle to prepare everything for my return. And to do so properly; it will probably be the last trouble which I shall give my people. I believe I shall only reach home in time to lay me down and die."

Pavel did not contradict her. He felt, distinctly, that no contradiction was expected, as is so often the case with old people, when they allude to their approaching death; the remark was meant seriously, and he accepted it in the same spirit.

Late in the afternoon he reached the village. He went directly to the castle, in order to deliver the message of the Baroness. The servants flocked together when they heard that he had come; all looked at him full of curiosity, and he hastened away, fearing that they might ask him questions about Milada. On the road to the village he was the object of the same attention which he had attracted at the castle. One or another of those whom he met stopped with the evident intention of speaking to him, but Pavel hastened past them with a brief salute.

In Vinska's yard, on a bench, sat Virgil, who, since Peter's death, had taken up his quarters permanently with his daughter. He beckoned to Pavel to come nearer. " So you've come at last ?" he called to him. " Look here, your dog would have starved if I had n't looked after him."

" I depended on your doing it," said Pavel, and was about to pass on. Virgil, however, shouted at the top of his voice :

" Don't run so, wait ! Vinska has got something to tell you," and at the same moment the latter came out of her door, went to Pavel, and said to him in the humble manner in which she now invariably conducted herself towards him :

" We have heard of your misfortune ; we are very sorry."

" Let it be, let it be," he interrupted her.

" Tell him the other thing," cried Virgil, full of impatience.

Vinska turned pale. " Dear Pavel," she commenced, " dear Pavel, your mother has come."

He winced. " Where is she ?" he asked. " At my house ?"

" No ; she would not enter your house before you came. She would not come to me, either," she added.

" Did you invite her ?"

" Yes, I invited her to come to me and wait here for your return. She would not do it, however; she is at the inn. But she has asked about you, and could not hear enough about you. And she is up at your house from morning till night. She must be there now."

Pavel felt as if a huge piece of ice had fallen upon his breast. "Very well," he muttered. "I'll go then!" But he did not stir. His restlessly wandering gaze met that of Vinska, which rested in anxious suspense upon his features, and suddenly he said:

"I thank you for having invited her."

"You are welcome," she answered.

The hearts of both beat audibly, each one read plainly in the soul of the other. She no longer found in his the old love, but the old resentment was gone as well; hers was filled to its uttermost depths with bitter, unavailing remorse, proceeding from the consciousness:

"What I have sinned against you it is impossible for me ever to atone for."

Without exchanging another word, they parted.

Pavel slowly went up the village street. The sun was just setting behind the wooded hills, sharply and clearly the tops of the pines were defined against the crimson atmosphere. Clear shadows had spread themselves over the pit-cabin, they glided over his humble roof, dimmed the brightness of his small window-panes, and hovered around a tall figure which was standing in front of the garden, absorbed in the view of the sunset.

"My mother!" Pavel said to himself, "my mother!"

There she stood, unbowed by the burden of the last ten years, unbroken by the ignominy of her long imprisonment. Pavel continued on his way—no longer alone; the suppressed sound of whispering voices, of footsteps that were following him, fell upon his ear, filling him with unspeakable disgust. A crowd of curious observers were escorting him, anxious to witness the first meeting between mother and son. He did not look round, but went on, outwardly calm, to meet his fate.

His mother had turned, had seen him, and rapture, pride, and satisfied longing shone from her eyes; but she remained standing where she was, with her arms hanging by her side; she did not speak to him.

"God greet you, mother," he said, hastily, in a constrained voice. "Why do you stay outside? Come in."

"I did not know whether I might," she replied, without taking her eyes off him, from which spoke a love, a blissful delight, which poured in upon him like warmth and light. "I did not think to find you thus, my son," her voice trembled with deepest, innermost joy, "not as I do find you. I would not bring shame upon you, Pavel."

At this he took her hand :

"Come, mother, come, and once more : God greet you," he said, led her into the house, and noticed that she involuntarily made a sign of the cross as she entered. "Sit down, mother," he continued ; "I have much to tell you ; much that is sad."

She had seated herself, looked about the room in agitation and astonishment, and said :

"I know beforehand what you have to tell me ; that I cannot stay here. I do not feel sad, only happy, very happy that I have found you as you are, as I see you. It would never have entered my head, my son, to be a burden to you ; and when you wrote : 'I am building a house for you,' I thought : 'Build it, and may God bless every brick in your walls. Build, build, but for yourself, not for me.'"

"Why did you think so ?"

"Because I have a judge in you, my son," she replied, calmly, and without the shadow of a reproach ; and he asked, disconcerted :

"What do you mean ? I do not understand you."

"If I had not had a judge in you," she continued, with the same equanimity, "you would have looked after me sometimes. I know what it means that you have never done so, and therefore I only came here because I could not stand it any longer not to see you, and am going away again this very day."

"Where? You can't go back to the prison?"

"Not there, but to our hospital, where I am a nurse."

"Indeed, mother! Since when?"

"Since a couple of months."

"That must be hard, to act as nurse to those bad people."

"Hard and easy; the worst often become the best, if they need us. And hard or easy, what matters it? I have my home there; I am content. Oh, dear Lord, more than content." And again her radiant eyes rested on her son with unfathomable love. "More than content, because I have seen you now, so strong, so good, so healthy. And my second child, whom they have given to God, whom I may not see —Milada?" Pavel groaned. "Is she a young nun, now?"

"No, mother."

"No?" She trembled at the agonized tone of his words. "No?" she murmured, with dry lips and failing breath, "has she not been found worthy of that highest grace?"

"Oh, mother," cried Pavel, "what are you saying?

Not worthy? She was a saint—that is the sad news which I wanted to tell you at first—Milada is dead!"

"Dead!" Doubtingly, in a hard, slow voice she said it after him, and then suddenly cried: "No, no, no!"

"She died three days ago, mother."

She sank back in her chair, crushed by the weight of a sorrow which was mightier than she. By degrees only life returned to her features, and their rigidity gave way to an expression of sorrowful enthusiasm. "I believe you, my son, I believe you. She was a saint; and now she is in heaven, and there I shall find her, when it will please the Lord to summon me."

"Mother," replied Pavel, hesitating, "do you really hope to go to heaven?"

"Do I hope it? I know I shall! God is just!"

"Say merciful. Do you not mean merciful?"

His mother sat erect. "I say just," she repeated, with a sublime confidence before which all his doubts vanished, and which kindled in him a faith in this poor outlawed woman, firmer, truer, and more inspiring than ever, a faith in that which is highest and most glorious. He drew nearer to her, his lips parted; she raised her hands in entreaty. "Ask me no more, I cannot answer you. So long as the law exists that the wife shall be subject to her husband, so long she must have no other judge on earth than that husband; for he alone knows whether she has taken part in his guilt or not. Do not judge me, my son!"

"No," he assured her, "no, and I will not ask. I only entreat you to say it of your own accord. Have pity on me and say it."

A sad smile played around her lips. "That I was innocently condemned; is that what you want to hear from me? It is the truth."

At this he broke out: "You guiltless—and I—merciful God! if that is so, how wickedly have I acted towards you!"

"Do not accuse yourself," she replied, with her imperturbable calm, "you were so young when I had to leave you. You did not know me."

"Mother," he could only say. "Mother," and he fell on his knees before her, buried his face in her lap, embraced her, and felt that he now held in his arms his best treasure, that which was dearest and most precious to him on earth. "Stay with me, dearest mother," he cried. "I will place my hands under your feet; I will make up to you for all you have suffered. Stay with me!"

And she, her face transfigured, a heaven in her bosom, bent over him, pressed her thin cheeks to his hair, kissed his neck, his temples, his forehead, and said:

"I don't know whether I ought."

"Because of the people?"

"Because of the people."

He looked up at her. "What was it that you said awhile ago? 'The worst often turn into the best, if they need us.' Well, dear mother, it would be strange, indeed, if two people like you and me should not be needed sometimes. Stay with me, mother, dear."

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